

Joseph Greer
and
His Daughter

Henry Kitchell Webster

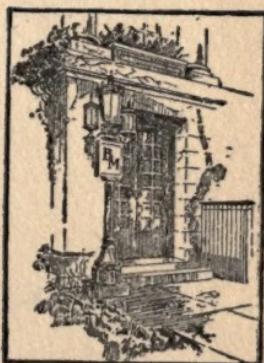


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JOSEPH GREER AND
HIS DAUGHTER



BY MR. WEBSTER

THE REAL ADVENTURE

THE PAINTED SCENE

THE THOROUGHBRED

AN AMERICAN FAMILY

MARY WOLLASTON

REAL LIFE

JOSEPH GREER AND HIS DAUGHTER

A Novel

By

HENRY KITCHELL WEBSTER



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Joe Greer's stories of the South American jungle are not inventions of my own. They are a few that have been told me at odd times by my friend, F. W. Updegraff of Elmira, New York, the narrative of whose wanderings among the tributaries of the upper Amazon is, I understand, presently to be published. If it has the charm of his spoken word, it will be an entrancing tale.

I wish to add my assurance that no other items of Joe's experience or of his character have been derived from Mr. Updegraff or from anybody else I know. Joseph Greer, like all the other characters in this novel, is, with the exception noted, wholly fictitious.

H. K. W.

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JOSEPH GREER AND HIS DAUGHTER

CHAPTER ONE

THE PAWN

1

ON THE face of it, John Williamson's invitation to lunch was nothing that Henry Craven need especially wonder, let alone worry, about. It was unusual—Henry couldn't remember, indeed, that it had ever happened before in just these circumstances—but surely one needn't feel on that account that there was anything ominous about it. The manner of giving it had been a little overbearing, perhaps; high-handed, anyhow. But that was John Williamson's way, and no doubt his place in Chicago's financial world entitled him to it.

Henry had been dictating a letter—around eleven o'clock this was—when one of the bank's more important customers spoke to him from across the marble rail. Evidently the man didn't care to come inside, so Henry went to the rail to see what was wanted. His telephone rang while he stood talking with the customer and, of course, his stenographer answered it. He heard her say, "Yes, Mr. Williamson." And then, "He's right here. Shan't I call him?" But John, evidently, hadn't thought it necessary to wait, even a minute. There was another pause

while she made a notation on a pad, and finally, "Very well, Mr. Williamson, I'll tell him."

She softened it up as well as she could when she transmitted the message, but he saw that what she'd written on her pad was: "Be at J. W.'s office at twelve-thirty. Lunch." No "if's" at all. Not even an "if possible."

Well, of course there were no "if's." John was one of two or three Olympians who, among their other cloudy vast affairs, directed the policies of this great bank in which his cousin-by-marriage, Henry Craven, after sixteen years of faithful service, had recently been promoted to be one of the assistant cashiers. Naturally, then, if John wanted him for any reason, big or little, Henry would come.

It was unlikely, wasn't it, that the thing was of any serious importance. It mightn't be a business matter at all. Some little domestic problem or other. Violet (she was John's wife and Henry's cousin) had a birthday coming next week. It was possible that Henry's cultivated taste was going to be requisitioned to pick out a present for her. Only, would John have wasted a priceless lunch hour—the most important hour of his hard-driven day—upon a trifle like that? It was inconceivable. The lunch table was just where men like John talked over and arrived at their major decisions.

Yet what major decision of John's could imaginably concern Henry? Unless—unless it was a question of Henry's own job in the bank. They weren't going to promote him again; they'd just done that. But suppose—suppose they felt he hadn't made good, and had decided to do the other thing. Wouldn't it be broken to him just like this, genially, over the lunch table? And wouldn't this, for that matter, account for John's unwillingness to have him called to the phone?

He pulled himself up with a jerk and shot a glance at his stenographer. Had his moment of panic been legible to her in his face? But she was gazing out nowhere in the sort of trance that is one of the accomplishments of her profession.

"What's the last thing I said?" he demanded. Then as the girl started to read, "No, give me the whole thing from the beginning."

He didn't need it but he did need another minute or two in which to take possession of himself. That fear—that damnable black dog of a fear had slunk at his heels since his first day at the bank.

It had been natural enough at first, when he was bruised and bewildered by a sudden tragic change in the whole prospect of his life. John had given him this job out of charity, or, if you preferred putting it so, by way of meeting an obligation he had assumed on marrying into the Craven family. He'd come into the bank as a lame duck.

There was, though, no reasonable doubt that he stayed and advanced on his merits. All the evidence leaned that way. But the fear persisted. Not, of course, as a constant companion. There were days, weeks of them together sometimes, when he never thought of it. But at some trifling enigma, fancied very likely, in the conduct of one of his superiors, some conversation unavoidably half overheard, some smile that he felt glanced his way, the thing would seize him like a spasm of pain from an injured nerve.

He knew it was a weakness. He made valiant attempts to conquer it. He grew ashamed of it. He developed the corollary fear that it would be discovered.

His latest promotion had, he'd supposed, worked a cure. An assistant cashier was one of the officers of the bank. "If ever they make me an officer," he had said to himself a thousand times, "then I'll know I'm safe." And indeed, during the three months since it had occurred, he'd been breathing deeper, luxuriating in a new security.

But now, for no better reason than that his cousin John had invited him to lunch, he was quaking at the pit of his stomach like a schoolboy who's been told to report to the principal. It was absurd. He laughed at the absurdity, and then kicked the recurrent question—

what, after all, *did* John want of him—out of his mind and vigorously resumed the dictation of his letter.

At twelve-thirty precisely he opened the door to John Williamson's suite of offices. These occupied a corner of the top floor of the bank building. The girl at the telephone board greeted Henry politely and asked him to come in and sit down. Mr. Williamson was engaged just now but, she thought, wouldn't keep him waiting long. So Henry sat down, in his overcoat, upon the chair she indicated to him.

A desire came flooding over him as he sat upon that straight chair in the outer office, both feet square on the floor, his Derby hat balanced primly upon his knees, and, for something to do, breathed upon and polished his eyeglasses assiduously over and over again,—a passionate desire to do something unexpected, wicked quite possibly, but successful, immense; to the effect that telephone girls should stand in awe of him and private secretaries treat him with respect.

"I'm sorry you should have to wait," the girl said, when she came to the end of the letter she was typing. "Mr. Williamson's in an important conference but I'm positive he thought he'd be through before this."

Henry said it didn't matter, and might have gone on to enlarge upon the immateriality of the delay but for the sound of voices that began coming, now the typewriter was stilled, through the partition. This "conference" was taking place in the secretary's office next door. Words weren't distinguishable, but inflections and intonations were. One man in there was telling a story and the others were being amused by it. There was a sudden laugh, checked because the narrator went straight on and overrode it in a voice curiously resonant.

So that was what Henry was kept waiting for! He could see the picture in there, he was confident, as easily as if that mahogany partition had been glass instead. John, smoking a cigar, of course, sitting on the table clasping one stout knee in both hands, swinging the other

leg. Young Roland Mill, John's secretary, tilted back in his swivel chair, blowing smoke rings at the ceiling. And somebody—anybody of the sort who could walk past telephone girls and office boys as if they didn't exist, and open doors without knocking—held the stage telling them a "good one" he had picked up in New York last week.

Henry took his hat in both hands and sat a little straighter in his chair. The girl, he noticed, had the grace to blush over the way the excuse she'd offered for her employer had been betrayed. But the next instant she snatched her handkerchief, pressed it to her face and turned away. To suppress a sneeze? Or a laugh—at him? Probably he did look ridiculous, sitting there glaring. He was trembling. He must make up his mind what to do. Should he ask her sharply and authoritatively to telephone in to John the information that he was waiting? Or should he give him another five minutes?

But five minutes weren't needed. Almost at once, the door into Mill's office was briskly opened. Henry heard young Mill, evidently at the other door, say, "You can get out this way, Mr. Greer."

The man addressed stood there in an attitude of arrested motion, grinning back into the room. And Henry, while he stared at the sight of him, held his breath. All his fidgety annoyances were forgotten, swallowed up in the sensation which the man's appearance produced.

His beard was the first thing you saw. It was cut round and short—not fashioned at all—and it was black, as black as if it had been drawn upon his face with India ink. His hair was just as black and thick, and it was cut not quite short enough to hide a tendency to curl. Against this blackness of jowl and brow, the gleam of his teeth and the whites of his eyes made a dazzling contrast. But indeed, as you took him in, you saw that he was a bundle of contrasts. The lightness of his poise as he stood there holding the door, against the burly breadth of those shoulders and the bull neck; the look of gen-

iality that you got from his smile contradicted by his nose which jutted out in so bluntly aggressive a manner as to be—piratical almost, Henry felt.

He had answered Rollie Mill by saying in his peculiarly resonant voice that he always thought he was lucky, coming to a place like this, if he could get out the same door he'd come in by; and he continued for a minute rubbing this in. All these robber barons of finance had, he supposed, a chute down which the unwary visitor, having been shorn, was permitted to plunge.

Young Mill came smiling into the outer office at this, nodded politely to Henry, saying aside to him, "Mr. Williamson's just getting on his coat; he'll be right out," before he answered, more or less in kind, the departing guest. Henry thought he hesitated just momentarily whether to perform an introduction between the two and then decided against it.

When he came back from the corridor door whither he had ceremoniously accompanied the pirate, the secretary let out a long breath.

"Well, if any one wants to know what *I* think," he began—only it wasn't a beginning, for he said no more; lapsed into a gloomy secretarial silence instead, and withdrew to his own office. Of course, it was obvious enough what Rollie would think of a cheeky outsider who had the effrontery to look like that and to make vulgar jokes at his chief's expense.

John looked absent-minded when he appeared a moment later. He said, "Hello, Henry. All ready?" just as if it had been Henry who had caused the delay. "I guess we'll run along then."

He said nothing more all the way down in the elevator and up the street. From the turning he took at the corner, Henry guessed that they were going to the Union League Club for lunch. The oppression of the silence became unbearable at last and he broke it.

"How's Violet these days?" he asked. "It must be, I should say, two months since I've seen her."

"She's been east," said John. "Got home last week. Brought Dorothy with her from school. Easter vacation."

"Oh, I hope I may see Dorothy," Henry said brightly. "That's a lovely age—seventeen."

"It's a devil of an age," said John. "Dorothy's all right, though, I guess."

Then, coming out of his abstraction just as they were turning into the club, he took Henry by the arm.

"Did you know that fellow?" he asked. "The man who was up in my office?"

"No," Henry said. "I don't believe I've ever seen him before. I'm sure he's not one of the customers over at the bank."

"His name's Greer," said John. "Joseph Greer. Have you ever heard of him?"

"The name's vaguely familiar, perhaps, but I can't place it. I'll be glad to look him up for you, if you like."

"We've looked him up," said John. "I guess we know pretty much all there is to know about him. He's got a proposition we're going to take up. Going into business with him. I'll tell you the whole thing at lunch. That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

They'd got rid of their coats by this time, and had gone into the lavatory to wash up. Henry took off his eyeglasses, laid them on the little shelf above the bowl and pressed his palms against his eyes—a natural-looking gesture enough, he hoped. The sudden ending of the suspense of the last two hours had turned him giddy. His job was safe, after all.

He steadied himself as they went up to lunch with a spurt of indignation. If the courteous way of doing things had been John's way, that two hours of misery need never have been suffered. John could have said, with the loss of no more than one of his precious minutes, that it was to talk over a new business enterprise involving a man named Greer that he wanted Henry to lunch. It was in just such failures of real consideration that the

lack of true breeding showed itself. Just what one might expect from the son of old Nick Williamson.

Henry checked himself here with the reflection that this was how his sister, Margaret, would look at it. And then, a little startled, he sprang to Margaret's defense.

Poor Margaret! The ill-usage of fortune was a harder thing for a woman to bear than it could possibly be for a man. It was natural for a girl to cling to anything that gave her support, even as unreal a thing as a fancied social superiority long since forgotten by their world.

Margaret had been sixteen, Henry two years older or so, when their beautiful cousin, Violet Prince, married, and it was easy to remember that her selection of John Williamson had been regarded by the charitable members of the family as distinctly broad-minded and by the carpers as downright mercenary.

John had been all right, of course, even in those days. Nicholas Williamson's only son couldn't lightly have been left out of account by anybody. But old Nick himself, in a community just waking to the gracious superfluities of civilization, had been a hard lump to digest. It was not only that, to the last day of his life, he had ostentatiously chewed tobacco, drunk unconscionable quantities of corn whisky and delighted in ribald stories,—he was never done taunting his tamer contemporaries with their decline from these virile ways. It was his opinion that those of them who sent their sons to eastern schools and colleges and gallivanting about Europe afterward were making of their offspring a lot of cane-sucking damn fools. His boy, John, had gone from the West Division High School straight to La Salle Street.

Old Nick's appearance at his son's wedding was one of Henry's imperishable memories. Visibly exultant he was over his boy's success in running in and cutting out this prize from its surrounding convoy of cane-suckers. He had gloated over Violet like an ogre.

Violet's marriage would have been a melancholy occasion for Henry in the best of circumstances. She was

twenty at the time, pretty as a peach of course, and he, eighteen, addicted to sonnets, tender as a head of lettuce, was her first cousin, privileged and, by that same token, barred. He was one of the ushers, and he had blossomed out, darkly, for the occasion in the double-breasted frock coat of the period, tight-waisted, full in the skirt and incredibly long. Old Nick had leered at him and later, in his hearing, though not intentionally perhaps, had referred to him, with a guffaw, as "that young undertaker's apprentice." Violet had heard it, too. Henry still reddened when he rememberd that.

It was a satisfaction to think how short-lived had been old Nick's glee. The ogre was no match for a witch like Violet, and she promptly took his son away from him. She moved her husband bodily from his father's house—a red sandstone monstrosity on Ashland Avenue. The young couple never slept a night there until they were firmly established in a house of their own on the North Side. She taught John to dress for dinner even when they had no guests. She took him to the opera. She even led him so far astray as Palm Beach in the winter, when serious-minded men stuck to their desks. And she spent his money (there was a wicked lot of it, of course, and Violet's people, the Princes, had never been much more than comfortably well-to-do) like, the old man used to say, straw blowing out of a thrasher. So doing, she quenched Henry's young romance. There must be a streak in her, he feared, of a rather hard frivolity.

But if she, with the years, had come down in his regard, John had risen. There was real kindness in John. And though his humor tended to be boisterous and his manner was never precisely gentle, still it was hard to see anything more than that in him of the savage old satyr his father had been. John was shrewd; mostly, it must be admitted, on the make. He could treat nothing with whole-hearted respect that wasn't successful, and, being successful, he profoundly respected himself. He had increased two-fold, Henry guessed, the fortune he'd inherited from his

father, Violet's extravagances notwithstanding. And it was easy to read in him a comfortable sort of contempt for some of his contemporaries whose stewardships hadn't similarly prospered. Nevertheless, when disaster had fallen upon the Craven family, none had been kinder or more helpful than this cousin-by-marriage who needn't have bothered about them at all.

2

"Why, this man Greer," John said, after he'd eaten silently and methodically through the lunch he'd ordered and lighted a cigar, "is a mechanical engineer. Machine designer. One of the best in the business, Gregory Corbett says. Industrial engineer. Inventor. A whole lot of things. He's knocked about the world a lot, more than any man I know, I guess, especially South America. Tropical South America. He lived five years, according to him, on the upper tributaries of the Amazon,—River of Doubt and so on, long before Roosevelt came there. He went naked, he says, and the Indians thought he was some sort of god because he had so much hair on him and could do better tricks than their own medicine men. He's something of a liar, I guess, but even so he must have seen a lot of queer things."

Henry didn't doubt that. "And I should say," he added, "from the glimpse I had of him in your office, that he was still capable of going out looking for more."

"He's a queer cuss, and no mistake," John agreed. "But I don't think he's likely to go back to the jungle. He likes civilization too well. That's his weakness, they say, now. Drink and women. From all I can hear, he hits a pretty swift pace. That's one of the things that's held us back from going in with him. But he's prospered. Really made quite a lot of money during the war. He was making aeroplane propellers and some aeroplane machinery—gears and so on—out of compressed fibers. That Air Board was just his meat and he got into them deep. Signed up a big contract just before the Armistice that

he made them pay him half a million dollars to cancel. He's not lying about that, anyhow. We know all about it."

Still there was an air of skepticism about John,—the suggestion that he hadn't yet managed to lay his finger upon the thing that Greer *was* lying about. Henry must try to help. That's what he was there for, he supposed.

"If the man's got as much money as that," he ventured, "and really believes that his idea is valuable, why does he ask you to go in with him? I take it that's what he's done."

"Oh," John grunted, "that's the soundest thing about him. Shows he's got good sense. It shows he isn't one of these wild-eyed people who're always trying to swing a big proposition on a shoe-string. That's where a lot of visionaries get their grudge against bankers and so on. They start something they can't finish and they don't begin to holler for help until they're going down for the third time. And then they're sore, when their scheme is saved,—that is, if it proves to be worth saving—to find that it belongs mostly to somebody else. Greer is wise enough to allow for mistakes, delays, education—all those things. No, he's all right, as far as that goes."

"What's his record?" Henry asked. "What has he done besides run around naked on the banks of the Amazon?"

He was rather pleased with this humorous touch, and expected to win a smile from John with it. But John, though he boasted about his sense of humor,—there were two or three newspapers he bought simply because they contained comic strips which were favorites of his, and he enjoyed the sort of musical comedies they put on at the Globe Theater—didn't, as a rule, make nor recognize jokes when they occurred in a serious conversation, that is to say, in a business conversation.

He explained to Henry that Greer's Amazonian adventure belonged to the period of his youth. Since then, he seemed to have run straight enough. Evidently had an enormous capacity for hard work, which John found it

hard to reconcile with the stories of dissipation which formed a sort of nebulous fringe around him. He'd been employed, as a young man, by various big engineering firms in Chicago, along in the latter 'nineties and early nineteen-hundreds. Then, for some reason or other, not discreditable so far as John knew, he'd gone back to South America. Not, however, to the jungle. He'd lived six or eight years in Peru or Chile, perhaps in both countries, getting on apparently very well in his profession. He spoke Spanish like a native, it was said. And this was probably where he picked up his odd way of making gestures when he talked. His beard, too, another feature which made him seem queer, had been honestly come by, you might say, in the same environment.

Well, he'd come back to Chicago in nineteen ten, or thereabout, with capital enough to launch himself independently as a consulting engineer. And, from then on, they had a perfectly straight line on him.

There was no doubt at all that his work was first rate. Corbett and Company had retained him after their big fire in nineteen twelve, and had been important clients of his off and on ever since. Gregory thought he'd saved them a lot of money. He'd made some revolutionary changes in their method of routing material and products through the plant. He'd done the sort of thing for them that people heard such a lot about in connection with Ford's works at Detroit. Also, he'd redesigned a lot of their machinery.

So, once more, as far as that went, he was all right. If he told you a mechanical process could be carried out in a certain way, you were safe, no doubt, in assuming that it could.

"And, anyhow," John concluded, after a little pause, "that's the side of him we're going to do business with. Generally speaking, it won't matter to us when he goes to bed at night or who with, or how much champagne they've had to drink."

He lapsed into an abstracted silence, and Henry, this -

time, didn't try to break it. He felt that he'd achieved at least a pretty good understanding of John's perplexities. This tough-sinewed adventurer, barbaric, genially predacious, was almost as alien to John and his well-fed, sober, respectable friends—such as Frank Crawford and Gregory Corbett—as if he belonged to another species altogether. They faced him uneasily—with lowered heads. It was an instinctive mistrust, like that of the domestic animal for the wild beast that prowls about its stable.

The idea amused Henry. He thought he'd tell Margaret about it, even though she would be scandalized. His amusement deepened as it occurred to him how recent was the domestication of these stall-fed people, John and Frank and Gregory. To their fathers—grandfathers, at most—a man like Greer wouldn't have seemed strange. Not to old Nick Williamson who had buccaneered his way to fortune in the wheat market; nor to Myron Crawford who'd made millions as a banker in the wild-cat days out here in Illinois, when anything could be a bank and every bank was printing, *ad lib.*, its own money; nor to Gregory Corbett—this Corbett's grandfather—who had got his canny start building wagons for the gold hunters of 'forty-nine and the early 'fifties to cross the plains in. They were a hard-living, hard-drinking, as well as a hard-working, lot who would have taken this stranger in,—most likely in both senses of the phrase.

John's abstraction seemed to have come into focus at last upon his table napkin. He was feeling it between a moistened finger and thumb,—studying its threads.

"I'm one of the directors of this club," he remarked, "and I happen to know what we paid for this last lot of linen we had to buy. It was a frightful price."

Henry nodded agreement. "I know. Margaret bought me some handkerchiefs the other day. And they say it's going to get worse rather than better. I suppose this Sinn Fein rumpus in Ireland is what's doing it."

"Linen doesn't come from Ireland," said John. "At

least, the flax isn't grown there. Hardly any, only a few thousand tons. The world's commercial flax supply comes from Russia. We can pretty well count on it that the linen famine will last for years."

"Count on it!" Henry repeated. Then, perceiving that this wasn't after all a digression, "Has Greer invented a substitute for linen?" he asked.

"Not a substitute," John corrected. "It's the real thing. There's an average of two million acres a year sown in flax right here in this country, up in the Northwest. The farmers grow it for seed—linseed oil, you know. But do you know what they do with the straw? They burn it, close to two million tons of it a year, right in the fields where it grows."

Henry was properly amazed at this statement, and the financier went on to explain.

He said the linen industry was just about where the cotton industry would have been if the gin had never been invented. The fibers still had to be extracted from the straw by hand labor,—peasant labor, old people and children, who wouldn't have to be paid anything for their toil. The woody gummy stuff in the straw had to be rotted away from the linen fibers. Sometimes they did it by tying the straw into bundles and sinking it in the bottom of streams or ponds. Sometimes by spreading it out on the grass land where the dew and the wind and the sun could get at it. Anyhow, it took an everlasting lot of work and watching, and weeks of time. When it got rotted—retted, the technical word was—to the proper point, they beat it and combed it by hand.

Nothing like that would do for America, of course. There had been no end of attempts to devise a modern labor-saving process that would do the work, but they'd all failed. Mechanical processes ruined the fibers and the chemical processes were too expensive, besides being tricky and difficult. Well, Greer had got on to another way of doing it and it worked.

It seemed it wasn't the river water nor the

dew that rotted the woody fibers of the flax straw, but a germ of some sort—a microbe. That was all that rotted anything. There were hundreds of different kinds of rot; plants they were,—little microscopic plants—and some of them went after one thing and some after another. Greer had got hold of the special sort of bug that would eat the wood and gum in the flax straw and leave the linen fiber alone. In Europe, the universal practise was to pull the flax green, before it had gone to seed. One of the great advantages of Greer's method was that it produced practically as good results from the ripe straw, which gave you the seed crop as a by-product.

"You can't patent a microbe, can you?" Henry asked.

"No," John admitted, "but you can patent pretty near everything else,—method of inoculation, storage, all the machinery that goes into the process,—and there's quite a bit of it. No, there'll be no trouble about that. What we'll do, eventually, will be to license the process and rent the machinery to local corporations. But, in order to get the thing going, we shall have to finance and operate several of those local companies ourselves. It's likely to spread out into an enormously big thing."

"Take the matter of getting raw material, for instance. Right now, you could get it for nothing—or next to nothing. It's worthless to the farmers. They burn it. But give them the idea that it's valuable, and they'll try to hold us up. We may have to buy the seed as well as the straw; finance the whole crop. That wants more thinking out than we've given it so far. And, on the other hand, there is the question of marketing the raw linen without breaking the price. The longer you look at it, the bigger it gets."

Oh, yes, it was a big thing, Henry conceded that, and he listened attentively enough to the details which John now went on to talk about. So many shares of common, no par value; so many shares of seven per cent. cumulative preferred, convertible. Just the regular thing; a scheme

of organization with which Henry's experience in the bank had made him thoroughly familiar.

At the back of his mind as he listened, was the mediævalist's faint, unavailing regret at the fall of another stronghold. The picture, so revolting to John, of children and old people spreading the bundles of straw upon the dew-wet grass for the sun and wind to work upon; the jolly labor of beating and combing it; the pleasant domestic hum of the little spinning-wheel in the corner of the cottage during the long winter evenings; condemned, obliterated, by Joe Greer's scientific inoculations and the nasty clank of his machinery. Then, with a start, he came wide awake. What was it John had said?

"You're the man we've picked for treasurer."

"I!" he exclaimed. "Oh, I don't think I could. I—it would—"

He was trembling again, and he hastily hid his hands beneath the table. "It would involve my leaving the bank, I suppose, and I know nothing about this new business, you see,—manufacturing and so on. And my—my work at the bank has been satisfactory, hasn't it?"

He had to support for a moment a look from John's gray eyes as keen as the stroke of a surgeon's scalpel. Then, mercifully, it was withdrawn.

"There isn't the slightest question," John said, "of your value to the bank. But the bank's value to you, it strikes me, is pretty well played out. There's no likely chance of any promotion from the place you're holding now, for years. This new job outside is a promotion. We'll pay you ten thousand a year to begin with. That will make you and Margaret a lot more comfortable, and it will increase as the business warrants it. I'll carry a block of preferred stock for you. You can pay it off at your convenience. And the common that goes with it, if the thing does anything like what we think it will, ought to make you independent. That part of it's a gamble, of course, but it looks good to us. As for your being competent to fill the job, we all agreed upon that at once.

You've got a thorough knowledge of accounts and credit. And that's all you need, except loyalty, which, of course, we've got absolute confidence in.

"You see how we stand? We believe in Greer's process. We believe in his technical ability. But we aren't sure of the man himself. He's to be president of the company and he must be given, of course, a good deal of rope. We can't spend all our time holding directors' meetings on him, and it would hamper him unfairly if we did. Yet he's never had other people's money in large amounts to play with before, and we don't know how it will affect him. He may get Napoleonic ideas. He may be slightly crooked. He may have a fool notion that he can do us up. I'm not a bit sure that he hasn't. Well, as treasurer, you'll be able to see what's going on. Keep us posted. You'll be our only representative there, day in, day out. He's got somebody—I don't know who—that he means to make secretary. And the whole staff will be his. You'll be our watch-dog. Of course, you won't bark at him all the time. It would be a great mistake to keep him rubbed the wrong way. There's where a sociable kind of fellow like you will be especially valuable."

There was a little silence.

"Oh, there's no doubt in our minds," John concluded, "that you're the man for the job. You'll want a little time to think it over, I know. The meeting isn't until to-morrow, at three o'clock. Sleep on it to-night and call me up the first thing in the morning to let me know what you've decided."

3

The catastrophe which years ago had changed the direction and the prospect of Henry Craven's life was a commonplace tragedy enough, the sudden death of his father at only three or four years past fifty and the ensuing discovery by the widow and the two just grown children that there was nothing, or but very little more than nothing, for them to go on living upon.

Chauncey Craven had been a golden youth. There are plenty of old women to-day who still like to get talking about him—about what a voice he had, what looks, what a way with him. He made a fortune before he was thirty by a *coup de main* on the Board of Trade—wheat it must have been—and then dramatically abjured speculation altogether and settled down to the business of brokerage. But he never was very assiduous at it.

He was always, Henry remembered, mildly deriding his friends for taking their affairs too seriously. It was easy to be rich enough for all reasonable purposes. He'd proved that. Why should one submit to a grinding tyranny just to make one's self richer? The family had spent a good deal of time abroad, primarily in the interest of Mrs. Craven's health and seriously to the prejudice of the children's formal education. Chauncey was genuinely devoted to the querulous semi-invalid his wife had become, and was very affectionate and indulgent with the children. Henry couldn't remember that he had ever been denied anything he seriously wanted.

The boy's most pronounced appetite and aptitude was for music, and this Chauncey gratified lavishly. He even offered no objection to Henry's wish to forego college, which he wasn't at all properly prepared for, when the time came, and go on with his music instead. And, though there was no thought of his making a profession of it, Henry was still, in a desultory way, studying violin and composition when his father died.

What they found when they looked into Chauncey's affairs, though it horrified and astonished every one, was, after all, just about what might have been expected. The business—a half-hearted enterprise at best—had been losing money. His family was becoming more expensive from year to year as the children grew up and his wife's cures were farther fetched,—the easy and obvious ones having been long exhausted. So, secretly operating through another brokerage house, he had tried to repeat that brilliant raid of twenty years ago, and failed.

This happened three or four years before he died, but he revealed it to no one. He couldn't bear, Henry supposed, to dissipate the golden aura of effortless success which had enveloped him from youth. So he went on as if nothing had happened. There was no shortening of sail, no coming about upon a new tack. They had gone on living, of course, upon his depleted capital. He may have contemplated a third plunge in the wheat pit and have been waiting for a likely looking opportunity. He may have argued with himself that, by keeping up appearances, he was preserving his credit against this possible event. Or he may have been waiting for nothing at all, unless perhaps a miracle. Henry ached with pity whenever he thought of the hell his father must have lived in during those last years. Yet he had betrayed nothing, made no confidences.

Henry never really knew just how complete the smash had been. John Williamson had taken hold and recovered what salvage there was from the wreck. He sold the big house which Chauncey had built in the exuberance of that famous wheat corner (it was mortgaged to the eaves, of course) advantageously enough to wring a small equity out of it. Finally, with what the estate boiled down to, he bought standard securities. Henry had always suspected some benignant hocus pocus on John's part about this, but he took pains not to mention it. Whether that little fund was something they were rightfully entitled to or not they needed it; couldn't get on without it. The income wasn't sufficient as it was, with an invalid mother on their hands, not though they moved into a modest flat (in a good neighborhood, of course); not though Margaret came home from her boarding-school to be constituted sole nurse, and Henry took the place John's interest made for him in the bank. One by one, those thousand-dollar bonds had been sold—secretly, so that mother shouldn't suspect—in the interest of one promising method of treatment after another. She outlasted them all—she didn't die until the summer of nineteen

eighteen—but, by that time, Henry was earning enough to carry them along.

They'd been pretty hard years, those fifteen—quarter of a lifetime almost—between his father's death and his mother's; drudging, discouraging years. And, Henry reflected, harder for Margaret than for him. She had been, people were always telling him—as if he didn't know—a perfect brick about it. Faithful and tireless in her mother's service, endlessly self-sacrificing, so much, perhaps, one might take for granted. Margaret had done better than that. She'd kept herself from going slack. She'd managed, somehow, to dress well in circumstances and on an income that would have reduced a domitable spirit to acquiescence in frowsy hair and a soiled kimono. She'd gone out to dinner parties when her bones must have ached for bed and when there were hours of drudging domestic toil waiting for her when she should come home. She'd carried Henry along with her, driven him, spurred him, made him keep up his interest in music—even practise on his violin. And this pride and resolution of hers had won a sort of victory. Shaken in the sieve of calamity all these years, the brother and sister had never fallen through the meshes. They had hung on, thanks to Margaret, in the social stratum they had been born into.

Whether or not the victory was going, finally, to be worth what it cost was a question Henry had never been able to decide. They could have cut loose from many of their worries and been materially more comfortable at the same time by letting themselves simply drop out of sight, into a world where there were no pretenses to keep up.

To the eyes of their friends, there were upon Margaret no visible marks of the struggle, but Henry saw her closer to. There was a tightness in her voice when, off guard, she failed to summon the masking suavity, and a dry brightness in her eyes. Since their mother's death (a release, of course; there was no possibility of a contrary

pretense), the signs of the strain had been plainer than ever. She needed a change—even Violet had come to see that. But she passionately refused to go away. Henry's assurances that he could get on perfectly by himself for a few weeks, or months, missed the mark altogether. All she wanted was to be let alone, not fussed over; above all, not stared at as if there was something queer about her looks.

Henry came home early from the bank, the day John offered him that new job, and was relieved when he let himself into the apartment to find that Margaret was not at home. He had, he supposed, already made up his mind to accept John's offer. It was a promotion, of course, which implied the solidiest sort of compliment from John's associates in the new enterprise as well as from John himself. The feeling appropriate to the offer of a chance like that was one of exuberant happiness.

Let him think what the new salary (nearly double what he was getting at the bank) would mean. A competent servant here in the flat for Margaret, somebody who could cook a real dinner; less contriving over her clothes; the taxi not merely when it was a brutal necessity, but whenever it was desirable; Monday night seats—good seats down-stairs—at the opera; a good piano, so that when Novelli came to dinner he could be asked to play, or Paula Wollaston might be tempted to sit down at it and sing. None of that was a dream, though it would seem like one. It was all clearly and reasonably predictable from John's promise. The dream lay beyond that. A gamble, John had called it, but unless he had confidently and reasonably believed that it would come true, he wouldn't be putting his money into it. Independence. A restoration of the life which the unthinking boy he'd been had taken for granted as his natural lot. Security, travel, leisure,—his within ten years, five perhaps.

Yet, somehow, he could feel no thrill either at the dream or at the reality. It frightened him;—most of all, the smiling, formidable face of Joe Greer whom he was ex-

pected to watch. Suppose he shouldn't watch him successfully. Suppose, from his inadequacy to the task, the enterprise collapsed. Or suppose it collapsed anyway. Where would he be then? If it weren't for Margaret, he believed he would refuse. The bank at all events was safe, and he was safe in it. He knew that now. John had told him so, for the first time, explicitly. But of course Margaret was to be considered. And his present salary at the bank, with prices going up the way they were, was getting narrower all the time.

He tossed aside the evening paper he'd been holding in his hand without even unfolding, hoisted himself out of the easy chair he'd dropped into and wandered restlessly about the room.

He must decide before to-morrow morning. He ought to decide now before Margaret came home. She would be, he uneasily suspected, upset about it, and more so if he presented it to her as an open question than as a closed one. Well, hadn't he, as a matter of fact, already decided? The meeting was to-morrow afternoon. Wouldn't it embarrass John rather seriously if he were to call up in the morning and say he wouldn't take it? Had John weighed that for a moment as a possible alternative? Of course not. The thing had been settled practically from the beginning by John himself. The outcome, then, became one of John's responsibilities.

He took a long breath of relief. He'd fall upon Margaret when she came in and tell her joyfully the good news. He wished he'd thought to stop at the florist's or the confectioner's and buy something a little extravagant that might stand as a token of it. Perhaps it wasn't yet too late.

No, confound it, there went the buzzer now. Probably Margaret herself, though she usually had a key. He pressed the button to release the catch down-stairs and opened the door into the corridor.

4

It wasn't Margaret, though. There were two people coming up, and they proved to be Violet Williamson and young Dorothy. The latter, when she saw who was waiting for them, left her mother behind, took the remaining flight of stairs two at a time, flung her arms around him, gave him a tight hug and kissed him soundly, just as she'd used to do when she was unequivocally a little girl. It was a heart-warming experience and made Henry wonder what John had meant by saying seventeen was a devil of an age.

Violet, though, coming up just as the embrace ended, slightly raised her eyebrows over it, Henry thought. He hoped the child didn't see.

Violet said: "I might almost kiss you myself. It's such ages since I've seen you." But she didn't do it, and went on to say that she hoped Margaret was at home.

"She isn't," Henry acknowledged. "But she'll be turning up any minute now. Come in, both of you, anyway. You two," he went on, glancing from one to the other, "look more like sisters all the time. It's almost impossible to believe you're anything else."

"*Henry!*" Dorothy cried instantly. "How sweet of you!"

The tone with its artificial over-emphasis, adult, worldly, ostentatiously insincere, startled him into staring at her. The jolly child who had flung herself upon him a moment ago had been somehow suppressed.

He noted details now that he hadn't taken in before. The eyebrows narrowed to a finely penciled line, the sophisticated slant of the little French sailor hat, the pose erect and rather insolently square, the hands plunged deep into pockets. There was still in his nostrils a faint perfume that had been there, unnoticed until now, since she kissed him; some sort of innocent cosmetic, no doubt. His eye didn't detect it. She turned away under his gaze, easily enough, as if she were leaving the stage to her mother.

"I suppose that remark of mine must have sounded like a dreadful bromide," he said to Violet. "I was betrayed into it because it's literally true. Let me take your wraps and make you some tea so that Margaret shan't miss you."

"I suppose we might," Violet said dubiously. "It's only," she went on, apparently realizing that this hadn't sounded very gracious, "that I've a million things to do. I just got back last week with Dorothy, and I'm spinning like a top."

Henry nodded. "John told me. I had lunch with him to-day."

She looked up at him with unmistakable, if faint, surprise. "What are you and John conspiring about?" she asked.

Henry wasn't at all sure that he liked Violet, but it was true that he had never quite got over being in love with her. He was hypersensitive to her. The old string had vibrated when she'd spoken a moment earlier of the possibility of kissing him. He wondered whether she'd meant it to. It wasn't an unreasonable assumption. She was as pretty, he thought, as she'd been twenty years ago. If there was no look of youth about her, neither was there any of age. She looked as slender as the girl; her skin as smooth, her flesh as firm, whatever artful processes might have been employed to maintain these results. What she lacked she'd always lacked, and that was tenderness. This was what he had felt in that last question of hers. There mightn't have been any slighting implication in her asking what he and John were conspiring about, but he felt himself flushing a little and speaking stiffly when he answered her.

"John wants me to be treasurer of the new company they're getting up!"

He must, he supposed, have betrayed this feeling, for she brightened instantly and cried: "How splendid! I hope you'll make him pay you an enormous salary. What company is it? I don't believe I know."

"Why, there's a man named Greer," he began, but she, with a stare and a laugh, interrupted him.

"Not *that* man!" she cried. "Good gracious!—No, I don't know a thing about it, really, only before I went east there was quite a lot of talk about something he wanted John to go into. What's the new company going to do?"

It was a new process for making linen, Henry explained—a little lamely, for he felt he'd blundered somehow. Then he asked to be excused a minute while he went out and got the tea started. The maid, he thought, was out.

"I'm coming along to help," Dorothy announced, taking off her hat and chucking it into the window-seat as she said it.

Foraging with her in the pantry and through the ice-box for the materials they needed, he found his first impression of the girl who'd come flying up-stairs to hug him reasserting itself. She made little jokes about his ignorance of the establishment, exclaimed with whole-hearted delight over a trove of "*Lorna Doones*" in a paper bag in the bread-box, and consoled him when an exhaustive search had failed to produce a lemon.

"It doesn't matter about us," she said, "because Violet takes milk in hers and I hate tea whatever they put in it."

He had jumped at that "*Violet*" and now, looking around at her, he saw that she'd blushed over it.

"I was practising on you," she admitted. "She wants me to."

"Your mother?"

The girl nodded. "*Alicia Wodehouse* calls her mother by her first name—we spent last Sunday with them down in Philadelphia. And it does sound rather amusing and —*chic*. And of course when any one looks as young as mother, the other thing is ridiculous, really."

Henry was still speechless over this when he heard Margaret talking to Violet in the other room. He was stabbed by a prophetic sense that he'd committed a mis-

demeanor in letting loose a guest—even a child—in this part of the flat. It was a moment later that his sister, without stopping to remove her wraps, swooped down upon them in the pantry. She kissed Dorothy enthusiastically and held her off in both hands.

"You're a delicious-looking young thing," she said.

"I wish I looked like you," the girl retorted, a little flushed but easily enough. "I always have, you know."

People had just one adjective for Margaret—good-looking. She fell short of beauty and there was nothing pretty about her. She had regular features, rather finely modeled, a good skin and enough hair. Had her life run on in the channel that it had started in, she might have attained an effect of style, smartness anyhow. As it was, what she had achieved was a crispness of movement and inflection, an air of adequacy to any situation that might arise, which men, in the main, found a little formidable. The men who liked her best were older than she and married. But just this quality, it was easy to guess, was what young Dorothy admired. And you could not mistake the sincerity of what she had just said.

Margaret's smile, though, had a quirk in it. "It's lucky for you there's no fairy godmother hanging about," she remarked, "to snap you up on a wish like that." Then, abruptly, she shooed them out into the sitting-room to keep Violet amused while she got the tea.

Dorothy went at once, of course, but Henry hung back. He wanted, in two sentences, to tell Margaret about the new job before Violet should force his hand, but she misread his intention. "Go along," she said curtly; "you can't help me here." Still he hesitated for a second, but the look he met in her eyes was too much for him and he gave it up. He didn't quite dare, either, ask Violet not to mention it. She mightn't take it right. Trust to luck was all he could do.

And luck didn't favor him, because, just as Margaret was coming in with the tray (the teapot and the cups upon it were not, he noted, those that he and Dorothy had got

out, and she had found a lemon), Violet said, "It must seem strange to be leaving the bank, doesn't it?"

He answered quickly, "Margaret doesn't know." Then to his sister he went on, "John offered me a new job at lunch to-day and I—I'm taking it."

Her eyebrows went up with an expression which betrayed nothing but good-humored surprise, and she threw Violet, in parenthesis, a question as to how she wanted her tea before she made any other comment. Then she said, "It must be pretty good if you could make up your mind as quickly as that to take it."

"Well, I'm sure it must look good to John," Violet observed. "The whole scheme, I mean. Because unless it had looked—well—marvelous, he'd never have gone in with that man."

"Greer, you mean," Henry said, and turned once more to Margaret with explanations. "He's an inventor and he's found a way to make linen out of American flax straw. They've never been able to do it before and the farmers have burnt it—thousands or maybe millions, of tons of it every year. I don't understand Greer's process in the least. I'm not even sure that John does. But he seems to have no doubt it works. John wants me to be treasurer of the new company," he concluded. "The inventor himself is to be president."

"Have you met him yet?" Violet asked.

"I just got a glimpse of him," Henry answered. "I hadn't time to see anything but his beard."

"That's the man, all right," Violet said, with a nod. And went on, since they were both visibly waiting for more, "Why, he sounds amusing to me; really attractive. Jimmie Wallace likes him quite a lot. He likes to play with theatrical people,—that's how Jimmie knows him. But, of course, Jimmie himself isn't exactly what you'd call—austere. He's got an apartment—Greer, I mean—up on Sheridan Road, in the same building that Bella and Bill Forrester are in. Bella is quite an authority on him. Never met him, of course. But she meets *up* with him, ac-

cidentally you know, every now and then, and they get very pally. She's hoping, she says, that he'll invite her to one of his parties. They must be pretty terrific from all accounts."

"I got the impression," Henry observed, "from John's biography of him, that he's a bachelor."

"I don't know," said Violet. "It comes to that, anyhow. He lives in that big apartment all by himself. At least . . ." she qualified, and broke off with a glance toward her daughter.

"You needn't mind me," Dorothy said quietly. "I'm reading *The Literary Digest*.—All the same," the girl went on, looking up at Henry from the magazine her glance had fallen upon, "I think that sort of inventor would be a wonderful person to have about. Mostly they're so awfully noble and innocent, aren't they, and about a hundred years old? Or is that just in the movies? Anyhow, I think you'll like it a lot. I wish father would give me a job in the new company."

She rose, then, put down her cup and coming round behind her mother's chair, took her lightly by the shoulders. "I was to drag you away by force at a quarter to six," she said. (Henry noted how she had evaded using any term of address.) "It's nearly that, now, and you haven't done your errand yet."

"I'm having a dinner to-morrow night," Violet explained to Margaret, "and as things have turned out, I'm simply gorged with men. Can I steal you away from Henry? It's going to be frightfully dull, I'm afraid. . . ."

Margaret thought she could come. She didn't mind being bored, she said—as she went over to her little writing desk to consult her calendar—Violet's food was always so wonderful.

Dorothy had come over to Henry and offered him her hand, "for luck." He retained it as he turned to her mother and asked, "How about an even exchange? Or wouldn't it be proper? Or are you going to commandeer Dorothy, too?"

"Yes, it's all right," Margaret said, from her desk in the corner. "Love to! Seven-thirty?"

"Oh, Dorothy's perfectly—unattainable," Violet told Henry. "She's dining and dancing *somewhere* to-morrow night. I don't in the least remember where. All I know is I accepted eleven invitations for her for Easter week."

"I'm *desolated* that I can't dine with *you*," Dorothy cried in the best accents of *Vanity Fair*. "It would be much more amusing."

5

"I call that," Henry grumbled, after he had closed the door behind them, "an infernal outrage. Oh, not your going out to dinner!" he added, for he had caught a look in his sister's face that startled him. "I meant the way she's trying to spoil that lovely child. John said to-day that seventeen was a devilish age. He's wrong. It's thirty-eight that is."

"I didn't suppose you meant about the dinner," she said, her voice coming rather flat, "and I supposed you did mean Dorothy. But there was just a chance, I thought, that you resented the way John had treated you."

"John! In offering me the new job, you mean? That's because you don't know about it yet. Violet spoiled things, rather, making me tell it backward. It's ten thousand a year, Peg, to begin with,—stock in the company—*independence again*, if the thing goes right—something like old times."

He tried to enlarge upon the theme, as in his thoughts he'd done earlier—the piano, the opera seats, clothes, a good cook, taxicabs—but without getting any responsive enthusiasm from her to keep him afloat. He took the other tack, the fine reassuring compliment they had paid him;—not only John but the other associates, men like Crawford and Gregory Corbett—in picking him, as they'd unanimously done, for the responsible task of guarding their interests. They were putting a lot of money into it, half a million dollars for a start.

"It's not very much for them," Margaret demurred.

"It wouldn't even have been very much for John, if he were paying it all himself."

In a sense this was, of course, true. The outright loss of half a million dollars wouldn't—well, impose any economies on Violet. Yet it was Henry's experience with rich men on their pocketbook side, and this he tried to tell his sister, that they didn't take losses lightly, not even proportionately insignificant ones. In every transaction, big or little, they wanted full measure—good security; and they showed extraordinary skill in getting it. That probably was why they were rich.

She asked him abruptly, "When did you first hear about this?"

"Why—just to-day at lunch. You don't think I'd keep a thing like that from you. I'm sorry I told Violet first, but it came up naturally, somehow, and then I took it for granted that she'd know anyway."

"And you accepted it finally—right there at the lunch table?"

"No, of course not. As a matter of fact, John didn't ask me to. He knew I'd want to think it over—talk it over with you."

"How long did he give you to decide?" she asked.

"Well, the meeting is to-morrow afternoon," said Henry, and all the wind went out of his sails on the admission. "They'll want to know before then. I told John I'd call him up in the morning."

"That's what I thought you might resent." Her voice flattened down upon the words and, as she turned away from him, they were hardly audible.

"I don't feel I'm being unduly hurried," he assured her, "if that's what you mean. I've already decided, unless you've some serious objection to urge, that I'll take it."

"You haven't decided anything," she contradicted. She was still speaking in that monotonous tone he had learned to recognize as an early symptom of an emotional disturbance of some kind. She was upset over this, just

as he'd felt she would be. "You haven't had any chance to decide. You don't know whether the process works or not. I don't believe you know whether it's ever been tried or is just a theory. John's decided it for you. He's going to take a flyer. He can afford to lose as well as not. He's used you like a pawn in a game of chess—pushing you in. It won't matter to him whether you're taken or not."

He had no answer ready, and she went on a moment later to add the capstone to the fanciful edifice. "How do you know," she asked, "that there isn't some one else he wants your place in the bank for?"

"I haven't any proof that he doesn't," he said then, gently. "But that doesn't square with his history. He's shown us as much real kindness and good will, during the last fifteen years, as we've found in anybody. If he treats me as a pawn, it's because that's what I really am—on the business chess-board."

"You're three times as intelligent as he is," she protested.

"So was father," he reminded her. "Intelligence isn't the thing they play this game with. It wants a certain stupidity, really, to keep you munching away at it all day long, like one of John's Holsteins. Father couldn't do that; couldn't keep his mind on it. He didn't hate it until those last years, because he began by getting the better of it. Well—of course, I didn't begin that way. And until John showed me this chance to-day at lunch, it looked as if I never would get the better of it, short of retiring on a wretched little pension when I was sixty-five or so, too old to have any life left. This thing, of course, may fail. I suppose you're right, that it's more than likely to. But, if it doesn't, it's a way out. It's a chance to live a little, while I've still got something . . ."

He pulled up short. He'd communed with himself in this strain often enough, but he'd never heard himself saying such things aloud.

Margaret remained silent. She was sitting where he

couldn't see her face, so he went on, after a minute, discussing the thing more soberly. He had no fear, he said, that John would resent his deciding against the offer. He had really an explicit assurance that he could stay on at the bank if he wanted to. But his refusal would absolve John from any further concern about his fortunes. If he wanted to spend the rest of his life as a discount clerk,—and this was really what his duties at the bank amounted to,—he could. Whereas, if he took the new thing—under John's orders, if she wanted to put it that way—the failure of the enterprise needn't do him any harm; wouldn't if he'd shown himself capable of doing his part.

"I don't deny," he concluded, in another irresistible outburst of candor, "that I'm nervous about it—frightened. I'm supposed to watch Greer. They aren't even quite sure he's straight. I don't know that I can watch him well enough. He's the sort of person I detest; a tyrant, I think, and a bully. And of course, it will be all day long, every day. But I'm going to. That's the price and I'll pay it."

"You won't dislike him long," she said raggedly; and added, "Wait until you begin going to those parties of his that Bella Forrester tells about."

The breakdown of this attempt of hers to get on to a lighter note betrayed to him the fact that she was crying.

"It's nothing," she declared, when he, full of concern, came and sat on the arm of her chair and tried to comfort her. "—Nothing but just that I'm such a pig. I'm glad you've got the chance, and of course you'd be perfectly crazy not to take it. And I don't think the thing is going to fail. Even if it does, there will be the big salary for a while, anyhow, and that will mean a lot. You've had such a rotten time all these years! Now you'll be—well—freer, anyhow. And it makes it possible for you to marry. That's the main thing."

He arose with a sigh and, in spite of himself, a shrug. It was a topic that, in the past ten years, had been talked threadbare—oh, more than that, ragged as the wind-

whipped scare-crow in a farmer's corn-field. He didn't want to marry, either as an abstract principle or, specifically, any girl. Particularly and almost truculently, did he not want to marry any of the girls whom Margaret picked as possibilities.

To-day, though,—somewhat surprisingly, too, since as a rule the gloomier Margaret was the more a discussion of his marriage attracted her,—the topic was checked without running its course, either through likely candidates or ways and means. He wondered, a little uneasily, if she'd noted that impatient gesture of his. It would be a dreadful thing to be rude to Margaret.

In a tone which he thought really sounded lighter-hearted, she told him she was going to let him off his usual lecture.

"It won't be necessary any more, because it's going to be possible now for you to have a little fun. Not being held down—as you've been, poor old boy, all these years—you're going to blossom out, I can see that. You'll meet a lot of amusing people, and you'll find somebody."

"At one of Joe Greer's parties?" he asked, in good-humored irony. "One of his beautiful *demi-mondaines*? Can't you just imagine what a thrilling object I'd be to a person like that?"

There were humorous possibilities in the theme, and he glanced around at her for the tolerant smile which would have encouraged him to embroider upon it. But she'd fallen into an abstraction, looked as if she hadn't heard a word he'd said.

He was left curiously at a loss. He could think of nothing to say. Yet the protracted silence was irksome, almost painful, to him. He stood there for a moment over the table where earlier he had thrown the still-folded evening paper. About the act of opening it out and sitting down in the easy chair to read, there would be, it seemed to him, a sort of brutality. The silver box beside it contained cigarettes—for occasions when they had guests; at other times he and Margaret very rarely smoked. In a

kind of desperation, he took one now. As he turned away to get a match from the mantel-shelf, she spoke.

"I wish the war hadn't stopped so soon after mother died," she said; and added, with an outburst of cold passion, "If it had gone on another year, I might have had a chance, too." That was all; the gust had spent itself. With hardly a pause, she added, "I think I'd better go out and help Lydia with the dinner."

He had his cigarette alight by now and it did fortify him a little.

"How about the Blackstone to-night, instead?" he suggested. "By way of ushering in the good times."

She gave him at that a most amazing look. Had it not been Margaret, and at him, her brother, that she looked, you'd have said there was a momentary gleam in it of downright hate. It was gone in a flash, and she said in a commonplace tone enough: "Oh, not to-night, Henry dear. I'm feeling rotten."

6

The meeting the next afternoon was, so far as its actual proceedings went, a dull affair, the inevitable legal hocus pocus occupying most of the time. Two lawyers were present, a man named Nathan, who seemed to be Greer's attorney, and, across the table, young Craig from Aldrich's office, who acted at first as secretary of the meeting. Sometimes they differed solemnly and, it seemed to Henry, interminably, over a trivial matter of phrasing. Sometimes one of the principals took a hand. Once Henry heard Craig say to John Williamson, "Mr. Aldrich will accept this. He gave me a special memorandum on it." It might, from the solemnity with which he spoke, have been a special tablet from Mount Sinai, and John nodded with an air of complete satisfaction, his momentary uneasiness quite banished. To Henry, trying hard to keep awake, this seemed mildly ludicrous.

But there were two outstanding features of the afternoon. One was the place where the meeting occurred—Greer's offices in an upper story of one of the taller build-

ings which look out at the lake across Michigan Boulevard; the other was the light which this environment shed upon the man who had created it.

Henry's approach had been down a narrow corridor past a row of small private offices (one of them to be, from now on, his own). The room was as big as the directors' room in John Williamson's suite, but the chaste, almost vacuous, impersonality of John's—throne room found its complete antithesis here. This room was a place where a man very largely lived; and that man Joseph Greer, and nobody else. His desk occupied a not very important position in the corner of it. Two draughting tables stood over near the windows, although a glimpse through an open door revealed a large draughting-room beyond, in the other arm of the L. The wall space was crowded with filing cabinets and sectional book-cases, and the walls themselves hung thick with framed drawings, plans, perspectives, strange designs, photographs of machines.

About these latter, all of them inexplicable to Henry, there was, he noted with surprise, a look of . . . He stopped on the edge of calling it beauty, and adopted style instead. Odd that he should take that impression when he hadn't an idea what any of them was about!

The table the new directors were beginning to gather around was a big solid affair of oak, the varnish of its top pretty well worn away and the edges pitted by the hot ends of innumerable cigarettes—laid down by preoccupied men who had needed both hands while they talked. A shabby, serviceable room, cluttered with heterogeneous objects—samples, models. In a big box on the floor were a number of little bundles—of straw, of fiber, of tow, of combed-out stuff that might be meant for a wig for Marguerite, in *Faust*. The linen they were going to make, of course! Successive processes.

Well, when Greer came in—late; he was the last man to arrive—you saw at once that he belonged here. You perceived that all you had been sensing, during the twenty minutes' wait he had imposed on you, was nothing but an

outlying part of the man himself. And it might be (one mustn't jump to conclusions) his truest index. Those "terrific" parties—for actresses!—which had so fascinated Bella Forrester might not, indeed, be a myth, but there was no doubt left in Henry's mind that many a midnight must have found him here, in his shirt, sweating under the white glare of electric light over one of those draughting tables.

He seemed much less objectionably self-assertive here than in John's office yesterday. Possibly, Henry thought, because he had more real self-assurance. He spoke more quickly, exhibited what seemed like a real concern that he should have been late and took the trouble to explain that his tardiness was unavoidable. He roused a sympathetic vibration in Henry, too, by showing himself desperately bored by the phrase-mongering of the two lawyers and the long drawn-out liturgy of legal fictions which they insisted upon.

On the whole, then, except for the other outstanding feature of the afternoon, Henry's fears and misgivings would have been pretty well laid to rest.

But Greer sprang a sensation, along in the middle of the meeting. Of the permanent directors, three, by agreement, were to be elected at his nomination; himself, of course, his lawyer, Nathan, and J. MacArthur, who was, also by agreement, to be made secretary of the company. When the election had taken place and they were ready to go on as a directors' meeting, John turned to Greer and asked :

"Where is MacArthur? If he's to be secretary, he ought to be here to take charge of the minutes. Can you get hold of him?"

Joe's answer was to tilt back in his chair and, reaching around without rising, press a button on his desk. Henry guessed in that instant from a gleam in his eye, that something was going to happen.

When an office boy answered the buzzer, Greer said, "Ask Miss MacArthur to come in."

Well, there was nothing unprecedented about it, of course. Plenty of women were directors of companies and officers, too. But that they should have been led into electing her in the dark like this gave them a sense of having been tricked. John and Gregory Corbett looked pretty blank. Greer glanced around from one set serious face to the next with an open grin. He let the silence last a moment or two, then said:

"She was secretary of my old company—The Fiber Products—and I give you my word, gentlemen, she can't be beat."

The door opened just then, and she came in. They all got up, of course, and Greer, still wearing the remains of his grin, introduced them around.

Her manner, if not her appearance, was immediately reassuring. She acknowledged the introductions composedly enough, and then took young Craig's chair at Greer's right hand. Two or three cleanly directed questions and a cursory look through his notes put her abreast of the situation. The routine of the meeting could now proceed. She knew her business, so much was easy to see.

Yet she was not, Henry felt, quite the type of business woman he was acquainted with. Her dress had a somewhat mannish air which these, as a rule, are careful to avoid. It was a suit of light-colored homespun, quite new and rather smart in its severity. Certainly none of the women who worked in the bank wore clothes like that. And then it struck him that she was wearing a hat, a high-crowned, narrow-brimmed sailor of mahogany colored straw, sensible and rather severe—though it went well with her red hair. But why a hat at all, if she belonged here—as Greer had just explicitly declared she did? For that matter, why the jacket, which she loosened and threw back when she took her place at the table? Why not the skirt and blouse which they'd all have taken for granted, without a thought, as the natural thing?

Wasn't this, Henry wondered, exactly the reason? Wasn't it her wish to avoid being taken for granted as a

mere—stenographic convenience? Hadn't that hat a real social significance? Mightn't it be a delicate assertion of her equal voice and vote with the rest of them? She was a clever woman if she was capable of seizing a nuance like that. And unusually self-assured, too—unless Greer had put her up to it. But Greer wouldn't have thought of it.

The idea amused Henry. He settled back a little more contentedly in his chair, watchful to see what the others made of her; how, as time went on, they took her. He wasn't at all sure how he was going to take her, himself.

No doubt she was competent; irritatingly so, he might find her. She never was at an instant's loss for any of their names, for example, though they'd been flung at her all in a jumble. And one or two small tangles she straightened out almost negligently. There was something rather shrewd about her; canny, perhaps, was the word. She'd turn out, he guessed, to be Scotch rather than Irish. How old? Oh, around Margaret's age, perhaps, or even his own. Not young, certainly. But distinctly good to look at. That was a really lovely skin she had, for all its powder of freckles. And it was interesting to watch the restrained play of her eyebrows and her thin expressive lips.

Presently, his gaze got diverted from her face to John's across the table from her. John had felt the inclination for another smoke, drawn one of his thick cigars from its case, bitten off the end of it and struck a match. It was at this instant that Henry looked at him, saw him hesitate, glance at her and then, dubiously, around the room. It was pretty thick, of course; they'd all, or most of them, been smoking in there for hours. John shook out his match, content, apparently, to wait until there should have been an opportunity to air out a bit.—A triumph for the hat, no doubt.

She, with her attention on the man who was talking, had missed the by-play. But Greer had not, and his response to it was, with a grin, to get out his own cigarette case, spring it open and hold it out to Miss MacArthur; fairly, indeed, under her nose.

She might well have been startled by the prank, Henry reflected. She might have been painfully embarrassed by the implication in it. Business women, so far as he knew—secretaries and such—didn't smoke; not, at least, with their employers during office hours. But this woman was neither startled nor embarrassed. She declined the offer with a mere unceremonious shake of the head and without a glance at Greer. A quarter of a minute later, though, there flickered across her lips just the faintest smile; a mere quirk or dimple at one corner of her rather wide mouth. A moment later she glanced across at John, and, seeing him a little at a loss, his unlighted cigar in one hand and the extinguished match still in the fingers of the other, she told him not to mind her. She'd been thoroughly smoke-cured years ago.

That smile of hers grew more suggestive and disquieting to Henry the more he thought of it. He rummaged about for an adjective that satisfactorily fitted it. Contemptuous? It was as hard as that but friendlier. Tolerant? That wasn't active enough. Familiar? Oh, closer than that! Domestic—that perhaps was as well as he could do. He'd seen just that look go over Violet's face when John, in a rare mood, was being outrageous and she was amused in spite of herself. It was a look of one who has learned from long experience with a man that remonstrance will only make him worse. It was a look, too, of pure amusement, which meant, of course, that his prank hadn't rattled her the least bit in the world. Formidable as Greer might be, it was plain enough that Miss J. MacArthur wasn't afraid of him.

Henry was drifting, he perceived, toward a really startling conclusion. Was he going too far? On any accepted theory of evidence, certainly he was. Suppose he walked along with John after the meeting was over, and John asked him what he thought of the secretary and director whom Greer had so dramatically sprung upon them, and suppose he were to reply that he'd come to the conclusion she was Greer's mistress, and give his only reason. Heavens! John would think him a lunatic.

This, perhaps, explains why, when the meeting broke up, Henry avoided leaving the room until after John and Gregory Corbett did. It was easy, for they were prompt about getting away. His delay, occupied by the meticulous adjustment of his muffler before putting on his overcoat, gave Miss MacArthur an opportunity, almost an invitation, perhaps, to come up and speak to him.

"Wouldn't you like to see your new office, Mr. Craven, before you go?"

Her voice certainly had nothing—meretricious about it, and its timbre and intonation were grateful to the ear. He followed her down the corridor with a curiously stimulating sense of adventure. This notion he'd come to about her, though shocking, of course, to the whole moral fabric of his nature, hadn't at all the effect of making her personally repulsive to him. Was it possible that it cut the other way? Created a real attraction? He was startled by the suspicion that it did.

The room she ushered him into was intrinsically just the conventional quartered oak and ground glass box-stall. But its one broad window looked east, and at this height—the eighteenth or twentieth story—they seemed almost to overhang the lake. Three paces back from the sill, it was all you could see. It was amazingly brilliant to-day, for there was an east wind which swept it clean of smoke and the sky was splotched with a cloud or two which threw shadows of an incredible purple upon the blue water.

Involuntarily Henry gazed and held his breath. How in the world, he wondered, could he do any work in the face of a view like that! He wouldn't have dared say this, of course, to the new secretary, but she must have come somewhere near guessing it from his look, for she remarked, "We all had to get used to that."

She went on, after a glance which indicated she had got used to it: "This was Mr. Ferris's office. He was treasurer of the old company. At least," she added without a smile, "he was called treasurer."

He perceived plainly enough that she meant to tell him

something and waited, with a trepidation he was afraid wasn't quite concealed, for her to go on.

"I only meant," she explained, "that Mr. Greer is always so full of the one thing that happens to be on his mind that the rest of us have to catch hold just anywhere and fill in."

"I don't know how good I shall be at that," Henry said,—for it broke over him that with this penetrating young woman no pretense to infallibility would carry him very far. "You see I've always been at the bank where the work is very thoroughly routined. I'm afraid I'll have to rely on you to help me, anyhow at first."

"Call on me any time for anything," she said good-humoredly. "That seems to be the one thing I'm for. My office is right here next to yours," she added, after opening the communicating door: "Of course, now we're opening the new books, there will be a lot of things that you're the only one who will know anything about. I've always wished I was an accountant, but I've never had time to learn more than the beginnings of it. We'll see you Monday?"

He said he supposed so, and at that, with a nod, she went into her own office and closed the door behind her.

He dropped down into the swivel chair—his swivel chair now—feeling the imperative need of a few minutes in which to get himself together. But before the process of recollection had fairly found time to begin, he heard steps—Greer's, he was sure—come down the corridor and turn into the secretary's office.

"Oh, hello," he heard her say. "I thought you'd gone."

The other said—it was Greer—"God, what an afternoon!" and plumped down heavily on something,—her desk it sounded more like than a chair. They were as easily audible in there to Henry, through the Saturday afternoon stillness, as if they'd been in the same room with him.

"Well," Greer went on after striking a match, "I guess

we're really started, at last. I don't believe there's any more damned fee-fo-fum that they can think of. What do you think of the new . . . ?"

She silenced him—somehow, and must have let him know, in pantomime, that the man he meant to ask about was in the next room. There was a moment of silence—an agonizing moment for Henry—then a grunt from Greer and the sound of his rising.

"See you to-morrow?" he asked, in a tone a little lower but not much. "How about dinner up at the flat? My train doesn't go until midnight."

"I can't come to dinner. But lunch is all right, if you like, and the rest of the afternoon."

"Damn it, Jennie, can't you leave the one decent work day in the week alone?"

"You have too many work days as it is. I'll be there at one, but I won't wait. So if you're at work and don't feel like stopping, you needn't."

"Oh, all right! One o'clock, then. You're an infernal tyrant, Jennie."

"So would you be, Joe (or did she call him Joey?), if you got the chance, I guess."

A moment of silence; then, from Greer, "Well, crank up your little Ford and buzz along. Where are you parked?"

"Just around the corner. Can I take you anywhere?"

If he answered, it was with nothing more than a gesture. The next moment Henry heard her going.

Then, before he could move or think, the communicating door was thrown open, and Greer, at peace with the world and certainly unashamed, came in upon him. He gave Henry an amicable smile, pleased to find him there and not—thank Heaven—the least in the world surprised. Before speaking, he devoted a moment to a prodigious yawn and stretch.

"Well," he said, as he squeezed the water out of his eyes, "that's over. We're through with that sort of hoakum for a while, anyway. You found it as dull as I did, I could see that. Let's go somewhere and have a chin.

—And a drink,” he added. “I’m dryer right now than this country will ever be.”

7

The idea of assisting at Joe’s drink didn’t disturb Henry. He assumed a corner in some deorous club. But when he found his companion guiding him through the swing doors of what was, in effect, nothing but a common saloon although it was run in connection with one of the Boulevard hotels, he experienced a strong impulse to bolt. He hadn’t been inside a place like this in years;—the bank took a very high line in such matters. But he wasn’t expected, he found, to stand up to the long bar and put his foot on a brass rail.

Greer piloted him back into a sort of grill where, apparently, food was to be had as well as liquor, and when Henry, asked what he would have, opted indifferently for ginger ale, his host said, “You can have anything you like, of course,—coffee, tea!”

“That’s what I’d really like,” said Henry, “a pot of orange pekoe, if I may.”

Greer nodded confirmation of this to the waiter, ordered bourbon for himself and then told Henry that he liked tea but found it too stimulating. He had tried, he guessed, everything to drink that there was in the world, and had come to the conclusion that the most innocent of all beverages was honest corn whisky. But he didn’t go on from there, as Henry feared he would, to discuss the dark incredible approach of Prohibition. (This was in April, 1919.) There was something he really wanted to talk about.

“What do you make of Williamson?” he asked abruptly.

“Make of him?” Henry echoed. “Why, I don’t know. I’ve known him, you see, for a great many years. He married a cousin of mine.”

“Married, is he?” Greer reflected. Then, “Living with his wife?”

Henry jumped. “Yes,” he said. “Oh, yes, certainly.”

Apparently, from his host's point of view, it was by no means a corollary. But, having received Henry's assurance on the point, he was content to let it drop and go back to the main theme.

"Well, I don't get any of these fellows," he said; "the financial gang. I don't see how they get away with it. I don't see how they keep themselves alive. Oh, I know you're on their side. You were in the bank, weren't you? And they put you in here to keep an eye on me. But you're no more like them really, than I am. I saw that well enough at the meeting. There were a dozen times to-day when we both wanted to say, 'to hell with it.' But you've worked for 'em, seen 'em close to, so I thought maybe you could tell me the answer."

"I'm not sure I quite understand what it is you find puzzling about them," Henry said, sipping his tea and feeling queerly at ease for the moment with his companion. "I've worked for them, as you say, a good part of my life, but they've never struck me as—enigmatic, especially. Of course, they're—my own people. But you're quite right that I'm not one of them.—I'd have been a musician, if I could," he added.

"There you are," said Greer; "that's *something*. I suppose music's just a form of engineering, really, only it happens to be one that a man can't make a living by—unless he's a sort of freak. Well then, you're a musician; I'm an engineer. But what the devil are they? What do they see? What do they think they see? Oh, money, of course, but money's nothing but a way of getting things done. What is it they're trying to get done? If I had Williamson's money, I'd do something with it. So would you. I doubt if he even has fun with it. Not as much as I have—on perhaps a twentieth as much. Round and round he goes looking for safe investments for an income that's already five or six times what he can spend;—making more work for himself all the time."

"I suppose," Henry put in, "that it's really power he wants rather than money."

The other man snatched the word away from him. "Power! I understand power, or I think I do. Power is what can be used to move something. Well now, see here! Here's a man who's got a hobby for buying electric storage cells and charging them, and he goes on collecting more and more of them and you go to him and say, 'What are you going to do with all this?' and he says, 'Oh, I'm going to run a motor-generator outfit to charge more cells.' Couldn't you take him before a judge and get a conservator appointed on the strength of that? Of course you could. Well, what's the difference? What does Williamson want to run? The city? He could, if he liked—Roger Sullivan did. A railroad? A steamship line? An opera company? A harem? I don't care what. But it ought to be something."

Henry said at this point that John did run, or had a voice in running, an immense number of things. There were a dozen directorates that Henry knew he served on, and there might be as many more he'd never heard about.

"Exactly," said Greer. "But his interest is financial in every case, isn't it, not operative. He's guarding his dividends, or increasing 'em. Here's an example of it right here; this company of ours. It's three months since I went to him about it. I had a letter from Corbett; that's how I got to him. Well, he was interested all right. There were three points to my proposition: the linen famine that was coming because of the state of things in Russia, the sixteen hundred thousand tons of flax straw that's grown every year in this country and burnt by the farmers in the fields, and the fact that I had a commercial process for making that flax straw into linen.

"Well, the first two of those propositions really interested him, fastened themselves in his mind. The third simply was true or it wasn't. He hires Fuller, Price and Company to make him a report on the thing. They look me up along with the rest of it. They typewrite it all out on sixteen gauge paper, bind it up in black Morocco and send it to him;—charge him a couple of thousand

dollars for it.—Well, if they've got the whole story of my life in it, it's cheap at the price."

He illuminated this parenthesis with a dazzling grin, but went straight on. "Williamson reads it, or, for all I know, hires somebody else to read it for him, and sends me word he'll go in. But in all this time—three months, mind you—he's never come out to our laboratory on the West Side, where he could have seen the thing *done*, actually done under semi-commercial conditions. He doesn't care about how it's done. Nor, for that matter, what we do. Any damn thing in the world that would show the same profit between raw material and finished product, and the same demand, would interest him just as much,—it would be *the same thing to him*.

"Cellulose fiber is one of the most interesting things in the world. I've been thinking about it, off and on, ever since the first time I found myself in a tropical jungle. And the things you can do by dissolving it, or by matting and compressing it, or by using it as a binder in plastic substances—there's no end. And we're just at the beginning, back in the Old Testament. But it might be putty for all Williamson cares,—or prunes."

He interrupted himself here to take another drink, and Henry said:

"You're partly right, of course, but he knows more about that process of yours than you think. And he knows he's not a technical man. It may be caution as much as lack of interest that's kept him away."

Greer caught that instantly over the edge of his up-raised glass. Henry found that glance of his curiously stimulating.

"Anyhow," Henry went on, "he told me himself quite a little about it—about the—bug, he called it, that you'd discovered."

"Hell!" said Greer, putting down his glass. "I didn't discover any bug. I'm not a bacteriologist. I hired a fellow—a young professor of botany at one of the universities, and told him to discover it. It took him more

than a year, and if I hadn't been there to speed him up it might have taken him twenty. They're queer birds, too, these pure scientists, when it comes to that. They don't care what anything's *for* any more than the bankers care how it works. It isn't till a man like me comes along and takes one in one hand and another in the other and cracks their heads together that anything really happens in the world."

The inward grimace Henry allowed himself at this must have shown some reflection in his face, perceptible to Greer, for almost instantly, with a shrug and a smile, he went on:

"That sounds like brag to you. Perhaps it is. But we're trying to get acquainted, aren't we? The sooner we do, the better all around; isn't that the idea? Well, then, you may as well know that I think I'm a better man than John Williamson or any of his crowd. I think you are, too, and that you know it. He inherited his money, didn't he? Wasn't old Nick Williamson his father? Well, the old man, I guess, had the goods. But his son,—why, he's had everything done *for* him. Turn him out in the woods without a guide and a pack-train, and I don't believe he could keep alive a month. I don't believe he could have earned his living with his hands and educated himself for a profession at the same time. Well, I did that, and I've done the other. And I could do it again if I had to, though I am fifty years old."

"Fifty!" Henry's surprise was genuine. He'd been thinking of the man as a contemporary.

Greer nodded. "Unless I've lost count," he said.

He paused reflectively over his drink, and gave Henry a chance he had uncomfortably been waiting for.

"Of course," he said, "I couldn't keep alive in the woods either, not even as long as John. I could hardly have kept alive, I'm afraid, even in the ordinary ways of civilization if I hadn't been helped. And the person who gave me that help, with a perfectly ungrudging kindness, was John Williamson."

"Well, your game's a different game from his and from mine," Greer said. "You're like some other people I know, writers and painters and such. All you really ask for is a chance to look on. But you can see what I'm driving at, and these fat people couldn't.—Oh, they have their good side, I know," he conceded. "That's more than I'd have admitted twenty years ago. I was a good deal of a sore-head at thirty. I had a grudge that used to keep me awake nights against the gang that has everything brought to them on a platter. I wanted them kicked out, to give better men a chance. But I've got over that. I'm willing that they should play their game as long as they'll let me play mine. But . . ."

His look belied his words, Henry thought. His eyes, smoldering, gazed out across the room. There was food for thought, for John and his friends perhaps, in the look of them. But an instant later, they came suddenly into focus and brightened with pleased recognition.

"Hello, Twitch!" he called in a voice that drew every eye in the room. "Where are you going? It's Franklin Twitchell," he explained to Henry. "You know him, don't you?"

8

The name of this celebrated comedian was, of course, familiar to Henry. He'd even seen him in bygone years upon the stage. But he'd have as soon expected to meet in person the King of Hedjaz.

"Why, no," Henry began, but by that time Twitchell was standing beside Greer's chair, and was thumping him with ferocious good will on the back.

"You damned old pirate," he cried, "why haven't you been to see my show?"

"Shake hands with Henry Craven," Greer said, "and pull up and sit down." He added, when this was accomplished, "Why, Henry and I were thinking of going to see it to-night."

"Have you got your seats?" Twitchell asked, looking a bit worried. "It's Saturday, you know. They're

likely to be sold out." He scribbled a word or two on a card, summoned a bus boy and despatched him with it to the box-office of the theater, which happened to be next door, overruling, with a wild glare of the eye, Greer's attempt to give the boy money to buy the seats with.

All this came through a fog of indecision and embarrassment to Henry, who couldn't, for the life of him, make out whether he was the Henry, Greer meant, or not. He'd never met the man before this afternoon and they hadn't, of course, said a word about going to the theater together. But mightn't this be just Greer's way? He could solve the ambiguity of the situation by getting up and saying he must be running along, but this would seem a frightfully rude thing to do in case there was no other Henry. And wouldn't the mere betrayal of his uncertainty that he was meant be interpretable as a rebuke of Greer's unwarranted familiarity in calling him by his Christian name?

To his relief, they got off at once upon a volume of jocund reminiscences which didn't demand his participation, so he sat small and concentrated on a little terribly strong tea which remained in the pot. The talk was amusing, though, and almost impalpably it enveloped him; a glance, a laugh, a word or two, a solemn appeal for his arbitrament of some ridiculous point of controversy, and he found himself answering in kind,—as if he were really one of them.

It seemed to have been agreed upon without a single spoken word on the subject that they were to dine as they sat, with Greer the self-elected host. He ordered an excellent dinner for Henry and himself; Twitchell, it amazingly appeared, was a vegetarian and so chose for himself. He was also even more incredibly a total abstainer from every form of alcohol, and this fact turned out to have a certain importance for Henry.

Joe had said, "I always celebrate Sunday by drinking champagne Saturday night," and with this explanation had ordered a quart of a very respectable vintage.

"Twitch here," he added, "doesn't drink a drop, so I hope you'll keep me company."

Henry took this for sarcasm, but the comedian confirmed it with a nod. "And I suppose," he remarked, "I've got as good a reputation for a drunkard as any man in the United States."

This myth hadn't, as it happened, reached Henry, but it accounted for itself easily enough. There was something disheveled both about the man's looks and about his speech which, in connection with the comic wildness of his eye, suggested the genial stage of inebriation.

Henry did drink a little at the dinner parties he and Margaret went to; never at home because they couldn't afford it, and never during the day down-town because of the bank. To-night, though, if the comedian hadn't forestalled him, he probably would have declined to drink at all, from a fear of committing himself to what might turn out to be a debauch. But the fact that one member of the party never began drinking guaranteed his own liberty—didn't it?—to stop when he pleased. He told Greer that he liked champagne with his dinner very much.

So began a golden hour for Henry—a chain of golden hours. The good wine and the good food played their parts, but these weren't novelties in his experience. The thing that was new was a strangely comforting, glowing, exhilarating sense of fellowship. These two strangers—as he had always reckoned such matters—had taken him in. They were friendlier, somehow, than any of his friends. Not by virtue of anything they did—for they did nothing but talk at ease while he, for the most part, listened—but by virtue of what they did not do. They did not, subtly, leave him out nor suddenly remember him in a way that showed they had forgotten. There was no implication that he was different in any essential way from themselves. Joe had said,—this was how Henry thought of him by now,—"Henry here's a musician." And it had come out that both these men knew lots of musicians, some of them famous ones, and that they regarded a

musician as a very good sort of person to be. An attitude of apology was not in the least called for.

And then, half-way through the dinner, Twitchell said, "I want to hear some jungle stories. That," he added, turning to Henry, "is what I put up with this old reprobate for. You haven't heard them all, have you?"

"Up on the banks of the Amazon where he ran naked so long?" Henry said audaciously. "I've been hoping to get that. I haven't heard any of them."

"What!" cried Twitchell, scandalized. "Then we've been wasting time. Crank up, Joe, and get started. Tell him about the Inca girl and the bug in the kite's eye.—If it isn't a kite it's some ether strange sort of bird," he went on explanatorily while Joe grumbled protests. "And it's a little bug in his eye that makes him see so well. And if you can kill him and find the little bug and put it in your eye, then you can see as well as the kite."

It took a good deal of cranking to get Joe started, for these jungle stories belonged in a remote past and he must have had to tell them countless times. And he never did get around to the Inca girl. But they launched him at last, and from then on until Twitchell had to leave for the theater, Henry listened entranced.

They weren't stories that Joe told, not, at least, after he got fairly into the vein—mere random memories of adventures as strange, as intrinsically incredible, as any that ever befell Marco Polo. Here was a man who had turned back the pages of history ten thousand years, if one was to believe his statement that he found people down there who were in the stone age, people for whom even the bow and arrow had not been invented, whose deadly weapons were a chunk of stone lashed to the end of a stick and a poisoned sliver of bamboo shot from a blow gun.

Other explorers in various parts of the world had found races as primitive as this, but these had come among them carrying the mysterious equipment of civilization: firearms, clothing, tents, trinkets for gifts and the rest of it. He had come alone, unarmed and literally naked.

"How?" Henry asked. "How could that happen?"

Greer explained simply enough. He had started up the river—an unnamed tributary of the Amazon—with a little expedition of four canoes manned by Christian Indians from the Jesuit mission and equipped with what supplies he had been able to pack over the Andes on two mules. He was searching for gold. There must be gold somewhere, for natives brought it in occasionally to the mission packed in quills.

They paddled steadily up this river for a month, and then, supplies getting low, his Indians deserted him in the night. His own canoe was wrecked. He got ashore in his shirt and drawers, and, for a number of days he could not compute, since before the end of them he was half delirious with fever and starvation, he struggled for his life with that impenetrable jungle. He had no objective, no hope, but he found one day a trail and followed it, careless where it led. All his clothing had been torn away by the savage spiked undergrowth of the jungle. His feet were a swollen mass of lacerations and imbedded thorns.

The trail he followed ended in a sort of house built of thatch, but surprisingly big, the home evidently of a whole community. A curtain of thatch over the gable end of it hung to the ground. He pulled the curtain apart and went in, more than half expecting to be transfixed by a spear as he did so and utterly indifferent as to whether this happened or not. The place was deserted, but there were the remains of fires in it, covered with ashes, and there was food. The tribe had gone away. When they came back, they would no doubt kill him—eat him very likely. But he had no thought of trying to escape. He ate, he slept, he extracted the thorns from his feet and bound his wounds with poultices of leaves.

Days passed, he didn't know how many. He grew better and stronger, became able to make little excursions out of the house, down to the river where he contrived to catch some fish.

One day, he discovered that the house had been visited

in his absence, and thereafter whenever he came back to it he found traces of some intervening occupation. The natives must be watching him constantly; whenever he went out, they came stealing in. That gave him his idea. They must think him a god.

Well then, his best chance lay in being one. A god was a being they could not harm. If he knew he was a god, he'd know they could not harm him. A complete indifference to danger, then, was prescribed. He must, so far as appearances went, take no precautions whatever. If they poisoned his food, he must eat it and trust to luck. If any weakness or illness came upon him, he must disappear until it was past. He must always remain unaccountable to them.

His appearance helped a lot, his beard and his white hairy skin. No hair grew on their faces and very little on their bodies. But he dared not rely completely upon that. He must develop some tricks. He had had, as a boy, some rudimentary sleight of hand. He practised it now.

He had weeks alone in that big thatched house before any member of the tribe ventured into his sight. By that time he was ready for them. He had his line and he kept it—remained a god, or at all events a supernatural master, which came to the same thing. He bluffed it out on that line, he said, with one tribe after another, for nearly three years. When he thought one lot was finding him out, he moved on to another.

"Three years!" said Twitchell under his breath. "Good God! Think of sitting in a poker game as long as that with never anything to draw to and your life always in the pot."

It was a terrific idea.

"But I want to know," said Henry, "what happened that first day, the day that first tribe came back."

Joe laughed grimly at the recollection. "Why, they got quite bold," he said, "when they found they didn't fall dead when I looked at them. Some of the young men came crowding up and one of them made a pass at me with

his spear. I had a flat white pebble about the diameter of a quarter palmed in my hand. I walked up to him and seemed to take it out of his mouth. Then I swallowed it myself."

"You mean you really swallowed it?" both men asked at once.

"Hell! I had to," Greer said. "I hadn't any pockets to disappear it in. It went down damned hard, too, because my mouth was pretty dry. But you should have seen their faces! The man was shaking all over, like an ague. I took his spear out of his hand, planted it in the middle of the fire and burnt it. That man was dead. I'd eaten his soul. He went out into the jungle and did die, for a fact. Partly of starvation, I suppose, but partly of clear fright.

"Oh, it was easy enough in a way," he added musingly. "The danger was that I'd get to thinking it was too easy and go off guard. The medicine men all hated me, of course; never quit trying to show me up. But my dope was always better than theirs. I could make better poison for darts than they could, and so on. I got on all right. Had a pretty good time, in a way."

It was plain that he meant it. His robust sense of humor had found much to feed upon. Even the grimmest of his adventures had their farcical side. And there were others that weren't grim at all; just pure breathless wonder.

When Twitchell, after three or four scowls at his watch, got up to go to work, he laid a reverent hand on Joe's shoulder.

"I always realize the next morning," he said to Henry, "that this man must be a liar. But, boy, *what* a liar! Come back and see me after the show, both of you."

"Sure," said Greer. Evidently, it didn't matter a bit to him whether they thought him a liar or not.

"Did you ever find any gold?" Henry asked, when Twitchell had gone.

Greer shook his head. "It's there, though. If a man went at it the right way, he could get it. But not for me.

It would take the better part of a man's life to get together a serious amount of it, and what's the good of gold if you've nothing to spend it on? What a man might do, though,—I've thought of this sometimes—is to go down there with the right sort of backing and equipment and make himself emperor of that country. A real old-fashioned emperor, half-god, like Cyrus and Alexander and those old blokes. Just think what Alexander could have done with modern science to help him out—wireless telegraphy, a couple of aeroplanes, a dozen men—he wouldn't want more than that—a dozen apostles as it were, who'd play the game for him. A half-god! Why, he could be the most powerful god that was ever worshipped. But I didn't have enough to go on. I was never more than three jumps ahead of a stone-headed club. No, I didn't get any gold. All I came out of the jungle with, that had any cash value, was nine heads. I sold them to a museum for twenty-seven hundred dollars."

"What kind of heads?" Henry wanted to know.

"Human heads," Greer told him simply. "Reduced in size; no bigger than baseballs, but in perfect proportion, so that they might have been little portrait busts of the men whose shoulders they were taken from. I watched the whole process. I suppose I'm the only white man in the world who knows how that trick is done. Come along. Those are box seats Twitch got for us, and unless we can sit up at the rail we shan't see a thing."

9

The sort of show that Henry supposed this to be had never amused him very much, whereas he'd gladly have spent another couple of hours listening to Joe's talk. He refrained even from hinting at this as a feasible alternative, however, since it wouldn't do to disappoint "Old Twitch" of their presence—after he'd been so kind as to give them box seats.

And the show most agreeably outran his tepid expectations. He thought he'd never attended an entertainment

which ran so brightly and swiftly, nor one which boasted so many excruciatingly comic moments. He didn't believe he'd ever laughed so hard in his life. Joe enjoyed it all as much as he did, roaring with laughter half the time (like one of these great monitor lizards he had been telling about—or was it some other strange Amazonian reptile?) until many an eye in the audience was turned to look.

Henry's pleasure was spiced, too, with a new ingredient. From the very beginning, Twitch had been slanting jokes in their direction, saying things that were meant for them. He made use, for instance, of the phrase, "In a kite's eye!" as an expression of incredulity; the whole audience laughed over it, but he and Joe were the only ones who got its full implication. It gave him a queer glow of pleasure to be a real insider, like that. They must be rather conspicuous, he supposed, sitting up in a box, and there were at least two people in the audience he knew: Bob Corbett and his wife.—But there couldn't be any real harm in that, could there?

He made another discovery, however, as the evening wore on, which he found rather alarming. Twitch was not the only friend Joe could boast in the company; there were two young women, both minor principals, who must know him, it seemed rather well. One of them had a couple of songs which she sang in a pleasant, throaty, mezzo voice, and the other was a French girl whose duty it was on two or three occasions to stupefy Twitch by the rapidity with which she spoke in her native tongue. Both of them played unmistakably at Joe, instantly following Twitchell's lead when he gave it and launching occasional shafts independently.

The French girl was distinctly attractive to Henry. He'd had a good part of his schooling in Geneva, and there had been a time when he talked French almost as easily as English. It was an accomplishment which had rusted with disuse, but his ear was as good as ever, and he recognized her speech as well-bred. Also, he took a satisfaction

in reflecting that there weren't, in any probability, three people in the audience, and quite possibly not one besides himself, who understood all she was saying.

Henry remembered Twitchell's invitation to come back on the stage after the performance, and Joe's offhand acceptance of it. It hadn't especially perturbed him at the time, but the prospect which grew clearer as the show went on, that these two young women were to be added to their party was most alarming. It suggested possibilities which Henry simply dared not think about.

The thing came to a most dreadful climax at the end of the performance. The company were taking their first curtain when Twitch, with that glaring grin of his, clipped these two girls around the waist and dragged them laughing straight down toward Joe and Henry, already upon their feet as most of the audience were. He said something which was mercifully lost in the din of the orchestra, but that gesture of his had unmistakably invited the two men—and offered the girls as the attraction.

Henry trembled with horror. He dared not look toward the Robert Corbetts, but he was sure they must have seen. Half a dozen people in their part of the house had laughed outright. It was seconds before he dared trust himself to speak. Then in a voice that he tried, in vain he feared, to make sound commonplace and friendly, he thanked Joe for a most delightful evening and asked him also to thank Twitchell for him.

"Why, you're going back with me to see him now," said Joe. "That was understood."

"I'm sorry," Henry answered, "but I think I must be running along."

This brought Joe around, puzzled, for a square look at him. Henry felt the blood come pringling into his face. Joe stared a moment and then, understanding, smiled.

"Hell!" he said, "it isn't going to be *that* kind of a party. I couldn't make a night of it if I wanted to. I've got to be at work to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. Come along."

Contrition broke over Henry like a wave. There was no possibility of pretending that he'd been misunderstood, and he could find no words in which to apologize for his injurious suspicion. The only way to make amends was to follow Joe back-stage and, presently, into Twitchell's dressing-room where the comedian, already in his underclothes, was wiping the grease-paint off his face upon a towel.

He welcomed them with a dignified courtesy which made an amazing contrast with that last outrageous prank of his upon the stage. An armchair was placed for Henry, a less ceremonious seat indicated to Joe, and a Japanese dresser, with the manners of a first-class butler, passed cigarettes and lighted them. Henry felt he needed one. This was a bewildering world he'd got into.

It was only a few minutes before Joe, without explanation, left the room, and he was gone quite a long while. But Henry got on very comfortably with the comedian. Joe was their theme, of course. Twitchell had never seen such a man. He'd sit up and talk and drink all night, Twitch said, and then take a bath, change his clothes, eat his breakfast and go to work with the milk wagons, just as fresh as if he'd had eight hours' sleep. No wonder he'd had experiences. He had had twice as much time for them as anybody else.

"A first-class chap," Twitchell went on, after having touched fleetingly upon some of the adventures in question, "a first-class chap, but with a temper like a hyena. Did you ever see it get away from him? Well, you don't want to. It doesn't happen very often, of course. He knows how dangerous it is. He says that's why he ran away from school in the first place. He choked a schoolmaster who'd said something unusually nasty to him, in his own cravat. Might have killed the fellow.—Have you known him long?"

"Not very," said Henry. And then added, himself surprised as it broke over him, "As a matter of fact, I met him for the first time at three o'clock this afternoon."

Twitchell laughed. "That's like him, too," he said.

When Joe returned, just about then, he explained his absence by saying, in a tone of disappointment, that the girls had a party on. They were coming up to the flat, however, for a drink or so, since they didn't mind arriving at their party a little late, and Joe was going to send them on in his car. He and Twitchell and Henry would have to carry on by themselves until bedtime, unless there was some one else Twitchell could think of to add to their company.

But Twitchell was a broken reed. He felt a cold coming on, he said, and was going nowhere but straight to bed.

Again Henry was forestalled. He'd meant to plead some such excuse himself. His misgivings were once more aroused. Joe was perfectly capable of making a night of it, so Twitchell had just said, even when he had a day's work to begin the next morning, and to accompany a pair of unknown young actresses to his flat at midnight seemed an adventure almost necessarily disreputable. Still, he couldn't repeat the other man's excuse, and he was unable to invent any other which wouldn't betray the transparent disbelief of Joe's assertion that the party was going to be respectable. So he concealed his misery as well as he could (wasn't this, perhaps, in the line of duty, since the stockholders' meeting this afternoon?), submitted in due course to an introduction to Bunny and Yvette—their surnames were pronounced to him but he didn't hear them clearly and they were never used again—and packed himself with them into a closed car—enormous as to hood and wheel base but designed for the luxurious accommodation of only two passengers—which they found backed into the alley beside the stage door.

Joe's chauffeur, Henry learned during the swift flight to the Sheridan Road apartment, never reported for duty until six o'clock at night, but was on call from then on until daybreak. Indeed, the only time when Joe felt the need of any sort of domestic service was at night. He worked all day.

A man servant, who seemed to take their arrival as a matter of course, held open the door of the flat for them when they came in. They weren't going to want supper, Joe told him, just sandwiches and champagne. The girls, by way of making themselves at home as Joe urged them to do, took off their hats as well as their coats. They'd been here before, Henry guessed.

But there was something in the air which reassured him almost at once that he was not in for an orgy. The dignity of the spacious drawing-room had something to do with it. There was a good piano; there was a wall thickly hung with etchings which looked as if they would repay scrutiny; and over the mantel hung a painting, a big Sorolla which warmed the room with a blaze of color. The furniture was well chosen and rather sparse. It was a room, in short, from which many of Henry's friends could have taken a lesson.

There was a little general talk, comfortably desultory, until after the champagne and the sandwiches had come in. Presently Bunny carried her glass over to the piano. Joe followed her, and together they rummaged in a heap of music which lay there. Yvette tucked herself up in an attitude of comfortable relaxation in a corner of a big sofa, and Henry, rather timidly, sat down beside her. He'd have been desperately put to it for conversation had not the wine and the musical atrocities Bunny was perpetuating at the piano relieved him of the necessity of keeping it up. Indeed, duty didn't seem, anywhere, to be involved. It was understood, all round, that you did what you liked.

He asked her, after a while, what part of France she came from. He'd guessed, from her speech on the stage, that it was the Touraine. She pounced upon this admission that he possessed her language, and insisted that they talk in French. It was ravishing to her to hear it. But Henry's French was marvelous! Why should he attempt to deny? All the more enchanting because of its faintly foreign accent. He himself was delighted with—and a

little incredulous of—his own loquacity. He wouldn't have thought he could do it.

And it was delicious, the way the girl lighted up at it. She became a chatterbox ;—told him, in torrents of talk, about herself. She'd had adventures almost as queer as Joe's. She'd gone out as a child to live with her sister whose husband was a silk merchant in Beyruth, Syria, and a few years later had gone half-way around the world with them to Siam. Her sister had died out there. Her brother-in-law had become, as she said, a little difficult, so she had joined the chorus of an opera company—a sort of Flying Dutchman of an opera company which perpetually toured from Bombay to Yokohama and never came home. She'd had enough of this by the end of a year or so, and in Manila had taken a job as a personal maid with an American woman who was about starting home. This engagement terminated in San Francisco, and she'd gone to work singing in a café. It was here Twitchell had found her.

What a life! Yet after all of it she looked hardly older than his little cousin Dorothy, and a lot more innocent. She'd hovered over most of the moral plague spots of the world, a bright-winged butterfly that had in some miraculous way escaped destruction. She adored American men, she said. She was in a position to appreciate how different they were from the others.

In a serious, unsmiling way, she let Henry see that she especially liked him. There seemed to be no coquetry about it. She made no advances and invited none from him. She was infinitely content just to sit beside him and talk in her own language.

They were interrupted, at last, by a summons from Joe. Bunny, after a quiescent interval, was once more possessed to sing and her attempts to accompany herself were more than Joe could endure. Henry must take her place at the instrument. He made a perfunctory protest that he was no pianist, but this being overruled he sat down at the keyboard and performed Bunny's accompaniment in a manner which they all seemed genuinely to admire.

Yvette seated herself beside him on the bench and, as there wasn't much room, held herself fast with an arm about his waist. Bunny stood behind him, her hands upon his shoulders. But these were hardly caresses. Or, if they were, there was a friendly unconsciousness about them quite disarming.

They sang more songs all together, old ones—*Joan of Arc* and *The Long, Long Trail*. At last one of the girls looked at her watch, showed it to the other, and both exclaimed regretfully that they'd have to be going to their party. Their host would be getting grumpy if they didn't show up pretty soon. But even now there seemed to be no hurry. Joe ordered his car and opened another bottle of champagne while the girls were getting on their coats.

It was arranged, since Henry felt he must be going along too, that they should drop him at his apartment on the way down-town. The champagne was drunk, Joe was candidly kissed good night by both the girls, the butler, matter-of-fact as ever, ran them down in the elevator and accompanied them to the car with instructions for the chauffeur.

Bunny got in first, then Yvette, then Henry. And as he took his seat in the corner he felt a friendly little hand slip into his.

"You must be a wiz with the violin if you can play it better than you can the piano," Bunny said, as they sped through the park. "You ought to bring it up to Joe's some night and we'll have a real party."

Yvette, leaning contentedly against his shoulder, said nothing all the way.

10

His conscience dealt him a frightful thrust when he found Margaret sitting up for him. She was reclining in the sitting-room easy chair, wrapped in a bathrobe, a reading lamp at her shoulder and a novel in her lap. She yawned though, in a reasonably convincing way over his exclamations of remorse, asked him what time it was and professed herself astonished to be told it was nearly two

o'clock. It was only when he persisted in trying to explain his omissions to telephone at the two periods of the evening when he might have done so that she betrayed a flash of impatience.

"Good heavens, Henry!" she cried. "I'm not your wife, and I'm not the president of the bank. You don't owe any account of yourself to me. I happened not to feel sleepy, that was all, when I came home from Violet's, so I sat down to read for a while. I didn't know it had got so late."

The clock on the mantel shelf would have told her, though, if she'd glanced at it, and it struck the hours, too, rather aggressively. He glanced toward her book but she had both hands over it.

"What's Greer like?" she asked in a friendlier tone. "Do you hate him as much as you thought you would?"

"I'm not sure," he said, "that I know just what to make of him."

Margaret stirred slightly in her chair, and it came over him that his attempt to speak in a detached, judicial manner had been a little overdone. His hand strayed over the table to the silver box where they kept the cigarettes, but his sister's eye followed the gesture, and, with a little laugh which sounded foolish to him, he relinquished his intention. "I've already smoked a good deal for me, this evening," he said.

Then he pulled himself together and began on Greer. "Why, we've been together every minute of the time since the meeting broke up this afternoon. He came up and suggested that we'd better begin to get acquainted—since it was supposed to be my job to keep an eye on him. He said that in so many words; not in an ugly way at all, but as if it was a perfectly natural thing for John to have done. So we talked till dinner time. And then Franklin Twitchell—the actor, you know—came in, had dinner with us and invited us to his show. And, being an old friend of his, Twitchell got him talking about his jungle adventures. You never heard such stories in your life."

It began to seem to him that he was talking a great deal and rather fast, and that the sustaining interruptions he might have accepted from Margaret weren't coming. Was it possible that she suspected him of being intoxicated? Was he indeed acting quite like his normal self? It was an appalling doubt. He was sure he hadn't taken enough champagne to affect him in the least, but he had brought a sort of glow in with him from that ride home in Joe's car, which, innocent though it was, he could hardly undertake to explain to his sister.

After a pause, during which, after all, he lighted a cigarette, she asked him in a tone of good-humored indifference how he liked the show. It was very good of its kind, he told her.

He hated himself for the affected primness of his tone. He'd have liked to turn loose and tell her all about it; let her see how jolly it had been and what a corking time he'd had. But the freezing spell of self-consciousness which had settled upon him was too strong to break.

"And did you go on to one of Mr. Greer's terrific parties afterwards?" she asked.

There was no note of overt reproach in the question. Indeed, she had faintly smiled over it. But to his horror he found himself, as he answered, lying—to Margaret! By implication, if not categorically.

"Why, he asked Mr. Twitchell and some of the other people in the company to come up to his apartment for a little while after the performance. He wanted me to come too, and I couldn't get out of it very well, so I went along with them. But it wasn't 'terrific' in the least. We had some sandwiches and champagne, and they sang a little—old songs mostly. It was as innocent as—Aunt Dinah's quilting party."

Margaret got up deliberately from her chair and switched out the reading lamp. "And have you just been 'seeing Nellie home'?" she asked.

He rose too. "We all came away together," he said stiffly; "in Greer's car. The rest of them were going

on to another party—a dance, I believe. But they squeezed me in and dropped me here."

Margaret yawned behind her fingers. "I suppose," she remarked, as she moved toward the door, "that the decent thing to do would be to ask him here to dinner."

"Greer?" Henry asked incredulously.

"Yes," she said. "Why not? Isn't he the sort of person who could be asked to dinner?"

"Why, yes, of course," said Henry. "Yes, indeed. I think it would be a very nice thing to do. I am very glad you thought of it."

CHAPTER TWO

THE BETTER HALF

1

MANY persons less given to analysis than Henry Craven had speculated, during the past half-dozen years about the relation between Joe Greer and Jennie MacArthur. They saw, just as Henry did, that it differed somehow from the accepted standard for important, busy employers and their efficient, infallible secretaries.

Jennie, herself, would have found it hard to explain where the difference lay. It may be added that it never would have occurred to her to try. She belonged, temperamentally, to the adventurer class just as truly as Joe himself belonged to it. From her earliest years, chance had favored this development, but no conceivable circumstances could have made her a conscript. Life had never frightened her. She asked no better than to explore it on her own responsibility; accepted its challenges; played out its reasonable hazards;—an attitude more masculine than feminine, though there was nothing seriously abnormal about her.

When her first big chance came—this was back in nineteen twelve—she had been waiting for it like a cat watching a mouse-hole. She'd known that that nervous, headachey Miss Holt, smart as she was, couldn't last in the chief's private office very long. And when one day Miss Holt came out of the inner office in tears, put on her hat and jacket and collected her belongings from the drawers in her desk, and when the "old devil," as the girls called him, came storming out into the stenographers' room him-

self to pick out some one to go on with his work, it wasn't all luck by any means that he picked Jennie. She was the only one of the lot who wasn't in the flutters over the explosion of Miss Holt.

Jennie was competent and she made herself indispensable. But that was only the beginning of it. She took to Joe from the start. What appeared to the other girls as his truly infernal temper never worried Jennie a bit. She perceived there was no malice in it. He could think harder and faster than anybody else, and a long succession of contacts with muddled minds or irresolute wills drove him every now and then frantic. Her method with him was to let him rave until he got the worst of it out of his system, and then grin at him. She learned the trick of toning down his letters without making them sound tame and colorless, and before she'd worked for him a year, he'd given up dictating altogether. "Tell So-and-So to keep his shirt on," he would say. "I know what he wants better than he does and when I get around to it I'll tell him." Jennie would write an eight-line letter to that precise effect, but in a totally different vein, and Joe with a ferocious smile, would sign it.

"You're the only stenographer in the world," he said to her, apropos of some such performance as this. "Go to the bookkeeper and tell him your salary is fifty dollars a week. Any time you think that isn't enough, say so, but don't you dare leave me on any account. You belong to me, see?" He added, "You're not thinking of going off and getting married, are you?"

When she told him she wasn't, he gave a sort of satisfied grunt which carried with it the implication that she'd better not try.

He worked her mercilessly when the need was and often unconsciously he imposed long hours upon her by keeping her idle in his more relaxed moods while he told her stories. When he found that she was investing her savings in various highly speculative and adventurous ways, he gave her tips and sometimes took her in with him on

flyers of his own. When he formed his company for the manufacture of aeroplane parts, he made her secretary of it and fixed her salary at six thousand a year. In every ramification of his business interests, he gave her his whole confidence, which was something no one else, she was sure, shared with her, for he was naturally suspicious and secretive.

During the whole seven years, from the day when she'd first gone into his private office to the day of the directors' meeting that Henry Craven attended, she had never considered leaving Joe. She'd spoiled him. She'd endured much. She had occasionally flared up to match the red of her hair and driven some rebuking home truths into him. But, on the whole, she'd enjoyed herself enormously. There was a zest about the whole thing that made it more than a mere job; a sparkle of variety, and a spice, too, of danger.

Jennie was sophisticated enough to perceive that the fact of Joe's being a man and her being a woman was somehow a vital element in the relation. She wouldn't have endured in a woman many of Joe's outstanding characteristics, and she knew well enough that, had she been a man, Joe never would have taken her into his confidence as he had done; would probably have disliked and suspected her. Logically, then, it was a sex attraction that held them together, no matter how little it looked like it.

She had been wary of this danger, just at first, for even without the gossip of the office she would have known that he was a libertine. But she soon found that he was not given to playing the fatherly game as some of her earlier and more respectable employers had attempted to do. He never indulged in any of these petty, pilfering caresses, falsely unconscious but too small to make a fuss about, by which many a girl shut up in a private office with an older man is plagued. Having no moral pretenses to sustain—this was how she worked it out—he felt no need to deceive himself. His amorous impulses dealt with for

what they were, the rest of him was somehow released. Outside their avowed domain, he was cleaner-minded, she thought, than any Puritan was likely to be. It was in the light of her own sophistication that she was able to understand this.

Jennie, herself, had learned without any heartbreaking or otherwise lamentable consequences, that love was not, for her, anyhow, the transfiguring, all embracing, indispensable thing which its propagandists, the story-writers, would have her believe. To any one coming to the experience with the high romantic hopes, the expectation of a miracle, so sedulously fostered in the minds of brides and such, it must often be, she felt, a shocking and even tragic disappointment. She didn't see why people insisted on lying about a thing like that.

She wasn't sure she wouldn't marry sometime. She would if she found the right man and it seemed the sensible thing to do. The essential lesson of her experience was that love was a commensurable thing with other serious facts of life. It was possible to pay too high a price for it. A life without it might be a better thing than one in which it was unsuccessfully mixed.

Its mixture in her relation with Joe would be ruinous, she felt sure, no matter what form it took. The attraction between them was, then, a genuine danger, but, being wise enough to recognize its existence, knowing that this reef was there, she had been able for seven years to steer a successful course where a less open-eyed pilot might easily have suffered shipwreck.

It was facts, however, rather than appearances that she had to look out for. As regarded the latter, she could afford a superb indifference. She was a magnificently independent person, in that there was no one in the world whose moral disapproval could affect adversely her economic status. She'd gone with Joe on many a business trip to Washington, New York and elsewhere, and the Grundy aspect of such an adventure, or of her going to dine alone with him in his flat, never disturbed her in the

least. A smile like the one which had so exercised the speculative faculties of Henry Craven at the board meeting was the only tribute that she ever paid to the Moloch of propriety.

Joe invited her to such a dinner one night in May about a month after the directors' meeting, and within a few days after his return from a trip to the Northwest where he'd been engaged in settling the last details and letting the contracts for the construction of their flax factories.

Invitations of this sort weren't so very frequent, and they generally had a real occasion. (The two of them dined together impromptu often at some down-town restaurant as a mere conclusion of or interruption in a long day's work.) She'd been aware of something on his mind ever since his return, and from her first assumption that it was something connected with company affairs she'd come to the conclusion that it was not, or, at least, not altogether. His invitation to dinner explicitly confirmed her guess. He had something he wanted to talk with her about, he said. "Oh, it's got nothing to do with any of this." He smiled as he added on leaving her, "I'm going to surprise you, Jennie."

Well, there was that about him. No one could ever know him well enough to exhaust that capacity for surprises. In any close relation with Joe, you did well to remember this and to steer your course so that surprises needn't be calamitous. Jennie didn't worry and she wasted no time trying to guess.

A dinner at Joe's flat, whatever its occasion, deserved to be treated as a party, so she went home a little early that night from the office—there wasn't so very much to do these days—and dressed in a leisurely and luxurious manner in a jade satin frock which she had bought, luckily, only the week before. Jennie frankly enjoyed dressing up, and one of her few grievances against the sort of life she led was that it offered so few opportunities for this indulgence.

The dinner was at seven-thirty and it was still broad

daylight when she parked her little coupé in the side-street nearest Joe's doorway. In the doorway, she found Joe's chauffeur waiting under his employer's orders for her to drive up so that he might take her car into the garage and bring it around again whenever she wanted it.

He was a prepossessing youngster who had taken this job on getting demobilized from the army a few weeks previously. The irregular hours and the touch of variety about it made it, Jennie supposed, less unattractive to him than most of the berths open to a man in his position. But he was too good, she thought, for this sort of thing,—taking Joe's actresses on joy-rides in the small hours of the morning and so on; and she made a mental note, as she spoke to him, of a resolution to persuade Joe to find something better for him to do. His name was George Burns.

She told him her car was all right where it was, and that when she was ready to go she wouldn't mind going out to it alone, so if this was to have been his only duty for the evening he might as well consider himself at liberty. He thanked her, but she guessed from his manner that he didn't intend to act upon her permission. In the same moment she realized, and she blushed a bright pink as it broke over her, that the boy was shocked. That he attributed—it must be that—a sinister interpretation to her visit. Once or twice he'd driven her home from the office when she'd worked late and they'd got to be quite good friends. To-night he seemed to see her in a new and rather lurid light.

In the elevator, she decided she'd say nothing about the encounter to Joe, at least until she'd cooled down enough to laugh over it. But he, meeting her in the hall as the butler opened the door for her, had it all out of her in two minutes.

"Good lord, Jennie! What's the matter with you?" he asked at sight of her.

And to her "Well, what is?" he answered, "You look—as if you'd just been kissed by a traveling man."

At that, she laughed and told him.

"That's a nice mess," he commented with a grin. "Here, give me your keys. And go and take off your cloak. You know the room, don't you? I'll be back in a minute. No, I don't blame him a bit. It's all your fault."

He had, it struck her, a rather thoughtful air, when he joined her a few minutes later in the drawing-room. He stood for a moment a little way off, candidly regarding her before he spoke.

"You wear better-looking clothes than most of the women who have nothing to do but buy them. How do you manage it, Jennie?"

She felt that her new frock was vindicated, for it wasn't often he showed the slightest consciousness of what she wore. "I happen to be the right size to wear models," she said. "That's the answer. It saves a lot of trouble."

"The right size and the right shape," he amended. "It's more than your clothes that looks good to me."

There was the same quality, oddly reflective for him, about his gesture, for as he finished speaking he came up and took her by both bare arms just above the elbow, gently enough, as if he merely meant to hold her there until the end of his train of thought.

She was perfectly comfortable, in his hands like that, but it struck her—perhaps because of her recent encounter with George Burns—as rather funny that this should be true. They were great powerful hairy hands that held her, and the face, so near hers, could take on, easily enough, a feral look. She allowed herself to smile over her own complacence.

With a grunt, he released her and stepped away. "You don't mind me a bit, do you?" he remarked. "And you know me pretty well, too, wouldn't you say?"

"Pretty well—as far as I go," she qualified. "No, I didn't mind. I know you play fair."

"And it's—how many years?" he asked.

"That we've known each other? Seven, about." She laughed. "You sound as if you were going to ask me to give you a 'character' to somebody."

He shot a look at her so startled and penetrating, that she wondered if, in some preposterous way, her joke had come near the mark. But he heard the butler coming in with cocktails just then, and broke off to ask her what wine she'd have with her dinner.

"Why, if it's anything hard you want me to do to-night, you'd better not give me any," she told him. Whereupon, he swore and asked her what she meant; he'd asked her here for a party, hadn't he?

"For a surprise, I thought," she argued. "And I had a hunch it had probably been a surprise for you, too, and that you'd be wanting some good advice. If you do, and it's important, this cocktail will be plenty."

"Ice a pint of champagne for Miss MacArthur, Anson," Joe growled to the butler. "She'll never drink more than that, so there's no use wasting it. Bourbon for me.

"I'm the last man to complain of anybody following a hunch," he said when they had sat down to dinner. She perceived from his conversational tone that she was to be made to wait for the springing of the surprise. "I've saved my life that way more times than I can count. But sometimes you get a hunch that doesn't lead you anywhere. I had one like that out on this last trip. I kept getting the idea wherever I went that somebody in the crowd I was talking to knew more than he was supposed to, had some sort of advance information about our plans or about me. I couldn't pin it on to anybody, but it made me feel sort of jumpy. I really don't believe there was anything in it."

She offered no comment here. The faint nebulous notion which formed itself in the back of her mind as he spoke, that a banker like John Williamson had a long arm and might have reached it out in that direction, she dismissed, for the present, largely because Joe went straight on to speak of something else, which was clearly more important.

"There's one thing up there, though, that's going to make us trouble, as sure as I've got a nose on my face,

and that's this damned Non-partisan League. If those hicks up there knew what was good for them they'd run Townley and the rest of those agitators out of the country just like anybody else who was peddling gold bricks."

She laughed at him openly, and he demanded fiercely to be told what she meant by it, although she thought he knew.

"Why, you're the man with the gold brick, aren't you?" she said. "Anyway, what you want those hicks to do is to give you their good flax for just about nothing so that we can make millions out of it without doing hardly any real work at all. And the reason you'd like to run Townley out of the country is because you're afraid he'll put them wise."

He glared at her, and then, with a grunt and a grin, subsided. "Oh, I know you like to pretend to be a damned red Bolshevik, and you think that some time or other you'll get a real rise out of me. But you won't. You know as well as I do that those farmers would go on burning that good flax straw till Kingdom Come, no matter how many bulletins the Department of Agriculture sent out saying it was valuable. They're neither one thing nor the other, that's the trouble with them. They aren't willing to work, like peasants, and they aren't willing to think, and take the chance that they've thought right, like us. All they're willing to do is to make trouble for the men who do think. And they'll make some of it for us, unless I miss my guess.—It's a funny thing, too," he added, "but that angle of the game doesn't worry Williamson as much as it does me. You'd think it would be just the thing that would scare him worst."

Jennie found nothing especially strange about that. Agitators never had really worried the rich very seriously in this country. There'd been some sort of radical movement going on ever since she could remember, but the financiers always got their way in the long run. They pretended they were going to be ruined by this new law or that, and they fought it through the courts and all, but

when the dust had settled you saw them sitting just where they'd sat before, playing, with a fresh pack perhaps, the same old game.

Joe had been enjoying this, and his breast of guinea fowl at the same time, nodding every now and then, in grim acquiescence. The rich roused his indignation as easily as the Reds. But her conclusion made him glare again.

"You want to learn to take it easier, now you're one of them," she said.

"I'll never be one of them!" he vehemently declared. "We're going along with them just now, or trying to, because it happens to suit our ideas. But we're a different breed of cats, and don't you forget it, from that—stall-fed bunch. That's what Henry calls 'em, and he's got 'em right."

"Henry Craven?" she asked incredulously. "Well, but what does Henry call himself?"

"A musician; and he's a good one, too. He's all right, that little man."

To be sure he was; Jennie conceded this readily enough. Only, she wondered, what was Joe so sheepish about? The explanation came after a hesitant pause. "I went to dinner with 'em," Joe said. "Him and his sister, at their flat, last night.—So I suppose you've got a right to say that I'm turning respectable," he concluded.

Clearly, he was embarrassed about it, an amazing phenomenon to be seen in Joe. Jennie suppressed an impulse to laugh at him and asked him, with a good appearance of sobriety, if he'd had a good time.

He told her, a little dubiously, that he had; a first-rate time, it would have been, except that he didn't quite—get them. She wanted to know what it was about them that he didn't get.

"Why, I'd supposed," he said, "that they were society people; 'way up in G. But instead of that, they're very plain; almost shabby. At least their place is. They must have been starving Henry at the bank, and it seems he

hasn't anything of his own. They've got a good piano, but it's new, I guess. Since the new job. They had some nice people there. Novelli, the pianist, and his wife. She seems to be an American, though he's a Wop. He played for us, and he's a whale at it, I'll say. Then there was a Miss Wollaston. That was all except themselves and me."

"Mary Wollaston?" Jennie asked.

"I don't know," said Joe. "I didn't start calling any of 'em by their first names."

"A very blonde girl—rather pretty? I'll bet she flirted with you like mad."

"Girl nothing," Joe retorted. "A grand old girl of seventy, that's what she was."

"Oh, that would be her aunt Lucile.—I know all about them," Jennie went on to explain, "because they've taken up Sarah March's brother. He's a composer, and Paula Carresford—that's Doctor Wollaston's wife—is going to sing an opera of his at Ravinia this summer. Mrs. Novelli," she concluded, "is Rodney Aldrich's sister, or his wife's, I don't remember which. Oh, you've been in society, Joe, even though you didn't know it."

"You talk like a society editor," he grumbled. "Where do you get that stuff?"

"I always read Madam X. Sunday morning. Learn a lot that way.—Tell me about Henry's sister. What's she like? Is she older than he is, or younger?"

"Oh, younger," said Joe. "At least, I took her to be. Why, she's a higher-voltage proposition than Henry, a good deal. Knows what she's about, all right. Not what you'd expect, exactly. Dresses up to the nines, shows a good deal of leg, smokes cigarettes. She seemed very good-natured and agreeable, except for one nasty look she gave Henry when he did something she didn't like. She acted friendly enough toward me. I suppose that's because no one has told her yet what a devil I am."

The satirical observation that this didn't necessarily follow was on Jennie's lips, but she suppressed it. The force of the protective impulse which had sprung up in

her, surprised her. She saw the woman and her motive crystal-clear; hard, clever, determined, domineering—her brother's characteristic timidity made that plain; the masking good-humor belied by that one nasty look. She had cast her fly before ever she'd seen Joe, as soon as she knew that this big fish was in the pool. A clever fly; respectability brightened by the legs and the cigarettes! But weren't men the limit? How was it possible that Joe, with all his wariness, didn't see? Yet he didn't, at all. It was he who broke the silence that had settled between them.

"It was—friendly of her to ask me like that. And it was her own idea. Henry told me that in so many words. Didn't want me to think, I guess, that he was putting anything over on her. And they were all nice people. Nice, regular people." He gave an embarrassed little laugh. "It does look as if I was turning respectable, doesn't it?"

She managed some sort of reply that satisfied him. It didn't matter since he wasn't listening, anyway. A moment later, he laughed again and sat back in his chair.

"Well, that's the funny way life works," he said. "Just as I'm getting ready to settle down and behave myself, my wife's lawyer writes me to say she's going to get a divorce."

Jennie stared at him in clear incredulity. When she could think at all, she tried to warn herself that this was one of his jokes, but it wouldn't work. She knew him too well to be deceived. "Your—*wife!*" she echoed blankly.

"Didn't I tell you you were going to be surprised?" he said.

After a silence of a minute, she asked, "How long have you been married, Joe?"

"Oh, twenty years, about. Bring your coffee along into the other room where we can be comfortable. That's what I wanted to talk over to-night. I'll tell you all about it."

2

He won a reluctant smile from her almost at once by an absurd solicitude over the perfectly irrelevant matter of her comfort. The chair she liked best, placed with reference to the breeze,—cigarettes, matches, ash-tray.

"I'm not ninety years old," she said petulantly, to check his running about; "nor an invalid just up from an operation."

"You're pretty mad, though," he guessed.

"I don't know whether I am or not," she told him truthfully. "I'm just wondering how well I know you, after all."

"You know me exactly as well as you think you do," he asserted. "Look here! Annabel and I were really married—living together, I mean—about six months. I haven't seen her in nineteen years. She lives out in Pasadena with her father; her mother died a couple of years ago. It wasn't up to me, was it, to tell you the day you came to work for me that I was a married man not living with my wife?"

"Oh, it's been kind of a dirty deal all round. I guess that's why I've wanted to keep it dark. I've done a whole lot worse things," he went on, feeling his way, "and haven't cared a damn who knew 'em. And I never tried to make anybody think I was a plaster angel. But this proposition,—well, I never knew my own mind about it. I've always thought I might clean it up some day. Only when I did, I wanted to be in position to do it brown, see, the handsome thing, so there wouldn't be anything left to be said.

"And I give you my word, Jennie, I was getting ready to do it. I had it doped out that, when this deal with Williamson got settled, I'd run out to the coast and see 'em—see my wife, I mean,—find out what she wanted, straighten everything out. And then, some days ago, a smart Aleck of a lawyer writes me that she's going to get a divorce. Of course, it's all right. I let her know, long ago, that she was entitled to get one, if she wanted it,—

on any grounds she chose. As long as she didn't, I let it ride. Well, there it is.—Damn it, Jennie, can't you see it at all? You sit there looking like . . . ”

He broke off, perceiving that he'd aroused her.

“Yes, I understand,” she said, at last. “I ought to, if anybody could. We're more alike than you think, Joe. I could surprise you, too, I guess. No, I'm not going to tell you about it now. This is your party. Go ahead and tell me the whole story. What was she like? Where did you meet her?”

“Are you married, too?” he asked, with an intent look at her.

“No,” she said. And she put such a weight of meaning into the monosyllable that it stopped the inquiry as well as answered it.

Joe turned away thoughtfully to the smoking table and relighted his cigar.

“Why, Annabel was a Chicago girl,” he began presently. “Lived down in Woodlawn with her father and mother—Fanning their name was. I boarded with them back in the spring of 'ninety-nine, just twenty years ago now. I'd just passed my examination for a licensed structural engineer, got my seal and all, and I had my first white-collar job, down in South Chicago. But I had to come up to town a good deal, and Woodlawn was convenient—half-way between. They were the most respectable people in the world, those Fannings. Poor but genteel—good God,—so you could hardly breathe! They had put what money they had into the building boom that struck that part of town just before the World's Fair. They owned a whole block of brick veneered houses, empty, most of them, half the time, and renting, when they did, for just about enough to cover the repairs. I was the first boarder—guest they called it—they'd ever taken in, and we never spoke of money. I sealed it up in an envelope every Monday morning and pinned it to my pin-cushion.

“But you know, Jennie, that sort of thing looked good to me just about then. You see, I'm not a real rough-

neck—I mean, I wasn't born that way. I can't remember my mother much. She died when I was six or seven. I think she must have been a pretty woman and well brought up. But my father—God! I remember him. He was a schoolmaster, and he had a temper just like mine. I can't think of a more devilish combination than that. He had to hold it in, you see,—lose his job if he didn't,—so it struck in on him; poisoned him, you might say. The only person he could take any of it out on was me. I think he must have hated me. I know I hated him. But just the same, if I'd behaved myself, if I hadn't disgraced him, he'd have half starved himself to give me a college education and make a schoolmaster out of me. He was what you'd call a gentleman, all right. That's what I'm getting at—a gentleman and a scholar. There were a lot of good books around the house, and I read when I could without giving him the satisfaction of knowing I was doing it.

"I didn't run away, finally, until I was sixteen, and I was as old then as most men are at twenty-five. I had to begin shaving when I was thirteen, and I was older in some ways, God knows, when I left home, than Henry Craven will ever be.

"I suppose you might say it was respectability I ran away from. And when I came back to the States from Para, in 'ninety-three, it wasn't respectability that I'd come back for. Lord! I struck New York with two thousand dollars, and I blew it all in in a week, mostly in a poker game. Thought I was the best poker player in the world. Well, I didn't have any trouble finding three men who were better.

"I guess it was lucky for me I got cleaned out. I found myself, you see, on the edge of the gutter. And you want to remember what year that was—'ninety-three—bank failures, bread lines, Coxey's Army. Well, there was one thing got rubbed into me that year so that I'll never forget it. Everybody was hard-up, all right, the white-collar people as well as the rest. They failed in

business and closed their shops, stood off their creditors and went through bankruptcy. They'd hock their diamonds and fire a couple of parlor-maids and feel sorry as hell for themselves. But it was all in their eye, really. They kept just as warm and dry and well-fed as ever. And, since the same thing was happening to all of them, there was no disgrace about it. The people who got it in the neck were the artisans. A man might be the most skilful sort of cabinet-maker, but he was up against it just as hard as a Hunkie, in bad times.

"Other things being equal, you know, I'd a whole lot rather work at something that required bodily skill than sit at a desk all day and tell people what to do. But that year showed me there was nothing in it. The birds in the swivel-chairs have got the game rigged their way. I hated 'em. I hated their pasty faces and their flabby hands and their padded shoulders. Sometimes when I'd be swinging a pick out on a road, I'd see one of 'em go driving by and I'd want to take him and muss him up. I'd think what I'd do to him if I had him out in the jungle. But I knew I never would get him out in the jungle; I never could do anything to him until I had got to where I didn't have to do things with my own hands. That's why I got me a swivel-chair, see? Not because I liked it, but because I hated it.

"It took me six years, ten hours' work a day with my hands and eight hours' work a night with my head. Not all the time, of course. I'd break loose now and then and have a hell of a big spree to freshen me up and give me a new start. I always knew what I wanted, though, and at last I had it—a first-class engineering education. And I knew what to do with it when I got it, too. There's where I had it all over any college boy that ever turned up the bottoms of his pressed pants.—Well, and the next thing I knew I was turning up the bottoms of mine, too."

It was queer to see him detached like this, speculative. He'd told Jennie, from time to time, innumerable stories, incidents of that six years' struggle for an education;

queer shifts he'd adopted, fantastic and often not quite credible adventures. But he'd never given her a glimpse before of the wire upon which these beads were strung; the purpose and passion that held them together. She felt closer to the real man to-night than she'd ever been.

She left unbroken for a little while the reflective silence into which he'd fallen, before she prompted him. But presently she got him going again by suggesting that the cause of his concern over the crease in his trousers was Annabel.

"Why, no, not exactly," he said. "I don't remember thinking much of her just at first. I don't believe I saw much of her. She may have been away from home, or she may have been there and I not noticed her. She wasn't the sort of girl that I ever had noticed. No, it was the old folks I made up to. They sort of appealed to me. They were so fussy and innocent. I must have been close to thirty years old then, but in some ways I was a good deal of a kid. And it was a kid trick I played, pretending at first to be just as innocent as they were. I had had a good pious bringing-up, you see, knew the Bible and all that. Lord! I know it yet. It was all just for fun, in a way. I mean I wasn't trying to get anything on it. But for a while I was as careful and tidy and regular . . . Shaved every morning, telephoned if I found I was going to be late to meals. Even went to church with them a few times at first. Of course, I didn't keep it up. It wasn't very long before they began to get on to me; and as soon as they did, they began to worry about Annabel."

Once more he needed prompting. Jennie had to ask him what Annabel was like.

"Why, there was nothing the matter with her looks," Joe said. "Now I think of it, she looked a little like Henry's sister, though I wasn't reminded of it last night." He grinned. "Annabel never dressed like that, to be sure, and she'd have drunk poison before she'd have touched a cigarette, but there is some sort of resemblance, for a fact."

"I've never seen Henry's sister," Jennie rather firmly reminded him. "How old was Annabel? What color was her hair?"

"Lightish," Joe said; "not yellow; there wasn't much color in it. I was fooled on her age, all right. I took it for granted that she was just a kid, barely twenty, if as old as that. When she gave her age at the license bureau up in Milwaukee where we'd run off to get married, I found she wasn't but five or six years younger than I was.—It would have made quite a difference if I'd known that sooner," he added.

Jennie remarked that twenty-five wasn't too old for a girl to marry. But Joe said this wasn't what he meant. She was too old not to be more grown-up than she was.

"You see, she'd been having a fight with her father and mother. I'd seen something of the sort going on from the first. It had struck me, every now and then, that I'd interrupted a scene of some sort, when I came into a room where they all were. And Annabel would sit through a meal sometimes without saying a word, but meaning a devil of a lot. But one night, out on the front porch, she broke loose and told me her troubles.

"She wanted to be an artist, a sculptor, and they wouldn't let her. She'd been going down to the Art Institute for quite a while taking lessons in drawing and designing, china painting, I don't know what—maybe a little modeling. But now it was a question of a life class, and they wouldn't hear of it. They were shocked that she wanted to, thought it was improper and that if she was really a nice-minded girl as she'd been brought up to be she'd see it that way herself.

"Well, that interested me in her a whole lot more than I'd been before, and the line her father and mother had taken seemed so damned silly that the next chance I got I tried to put in a word for her. It was a fool thing to do, of course. It got Annabel in wrong, worse than ever, for discussing such a subject with a young man—she, herself, was furious with me at first for not having seen that

—and they were already suspicious that I wasn't quite so good as I looked.

"Now, here's a damn funny thing, Jennie. Here's a question I've asked myself a thousand times. Will you tell me why I didn't just pack my trunk at that point and clear out? I was tired of the old people and I wasn't in love with Annabel, not one little bit. I didn't even want her in a temporary sort of way. There were girls growing on every bush that were more attractive, that way, than she was. But I didn't get out. I went on butting myself farther and farther in. We had a hell of a time. The old folks would hardly speak to me. They sat around and kept watch so that I shouldn't be alone with Annabel. I think the only reason they didn't turn me out of the house was because they figured it was easier to keep us apart as things were, having a line on me, than if they hadn't any idea where I was.

"Well, the up-shot of it was that one day, along that summer, we took the day boat—the old whaleback, it was—to Milwaukee, got a license and a minister to marry us and spent the night at the Plankington Hotel. Came home on the train the next morning.

"The old folks wouldn't take us in,—and it wasn't a bluff either. But I found a furnished flat over in Hyde Park—it was easy enough to do in those days—and we set up housekeeping. I'd suggested a couple of rooms in some family hotel, so that she could have more time to herself. But she didn't want that. I was beginning to wonder about that famous career of hers that the whole row had been about. Finally I asked her one day why she didn't go over to the Art Institute and register in the life class. I remember how she looked at that and just what she said. She gave me a stare and then a sort of laugh, doubtful whether I wasn't joking, and she said: 'Why, you silly old thing, what do I want to go there for, now?'"

To Jennie, the pattern had looked clear, bald fairly, from the first mention of Annabel's confidences about a career. Mere propinquity hadn't been enough to attract

Joe to the rather colorless girl. So the family had tried something else. They were all in it, of course, and they'd played the game very cleverly. They had adopted what was perhaps the one trick that would have worked. She gave him, when he paused over Annabel's revelation, a commiserating smile.

"Poor old Joe," she said.

But this was enough to show him how she had taken the story and he dissented vigorously from her interpretation of it.

"You've got it all wrong, Jennie. They didn't want me to marry her. It looked like the wrath of God to them when they first heard about it, and it never looked like anything else. They never forgave me."

"She didn't really want to marry me herself. I bullied her into it. She cried most of the way to Milwaukee on the boat, and I think she might have backed out of it at last if the idea of turning up at home late at night and telling her folks where she'd been hadn't scared her worse than going through the ceremony with me."

"She hadn't any idea what marriage was about, Jennie. Apparently supposed there was nothing to it beyond house-keeping and a little familiarity. And she couldn't stand me, that's the long and the short of it. Lord! But she was conscientious;—all three of them were that. And she must have had a talk with her mother that straightened things out a little. The one thing that reconciled her to the relation at all was that it was legal and binding,—going to last forever."

"I can't think of a worse mix-up than that. Because with me, well, it had been like this. I'd never had anything to do with a woman before—I never have since, for that matter—who wasn't in love with me, crazy about me, for the time being anyhow. So this was wrong all around. Yet she might have made some other sort of man a good wife and been happy with him. But she didn't like me, even in other ways. I think I frightened her without meaning to. The way I talked shocked her."

I tried to reform for a while. Good God! I've seen her turn white over a plain 'hell' or a 'damn' or two, that I'd use without thinking. I never swore at her.—Never swore at you, either, did I?

"It looked for a while—oh, at the end of three months or so—as if we might make a go of it. She liked our little flat, dusting and sticking the furniture around in new ways, and making fancy desserts and things that she got out of magazines. And, in a way, I liked it, too. I liked the feeling of being anchored to something, having a real address in the telephone book. I liked feeling respectable,—and I was, too. Didn't do any bumming around outside.

"And then all of a sudden she got to hating me a whole lot worse. Took to spending most of the time at home with her folks. I tried to put my foot down on that, as long as they wouldn't let me in the house. But it didn't do any good. She went more and more and tried to keep it dark. Well, at last I got the offer of that big job down in Lima. I didn't really need it, because I was getting on first-rate in Chicago, but it looked to me like a good chance for a showdown. So I accepted it and then I put it up to her. She could come with me or she could quit me, just as she liked. Well, she quit, and I don't know as I blame her. I certainly didn't try to make it look good to her. I'd told her some of my jungle stories, and I guess she thought Peru was like that. She may have thought that the climate went on getting hotter the farther south you went. I didn't explain any. I wanted to get loose, that's the gospel truth. She went back to her folks, and I cleared out without saying good-by to her."

The only thing about this recital which Jennie found it hard to understand was Joe's seriousness about it, the weight he attached to the episode. It seemed strange that so inconsiderable a person as Annabel could have left any sort of mark upon him, let alone have bitten so deeply into his memory. He hadn't loved her. He couldn't possibly have loved a person like that. But mightn't he

have loved, and gone on loving, silently and secretly and perhaps a little shamefacedly, the things she feebly represented to him; domesticity,—all that sort of thing? Had he carried in his heart all these years an unacknowledged longing to be regular and respectable? It was a startling notion of Joe, but it offered the only explanation she could think of.

"And you've never seen her since?" she asked, after a few moments' of musing silence, "nor heard from her?"

"Oh, I've heard from her or about her, off and on. I wrote to her from down in South America, asking her if she didn't want to change her mind and come down and join me. As things were, it was natural enough she didn't.

"I didn't come back to the States until nineteen-nine, and when I started I went as far as Panama with the idea that I'd go on up the west coast, drop off at San Pedro, and go on up and see her. If I'd made the big strike I'd been playing for down in Chile and just missed, I would have gone to see her, no doubt about it. I'd have been rich then. Able to make a proposition that I needn't be ashamed of, however she took it—if you see what I mean. But I wasn't rich by a devil of a way. I had just about enough to start myself again decently in Chicago, to come back looking like a successful man. It's always been that way with me, pretty much. I'm always either just broke, or just on the point of making a hell of a big thing. Anyhow, I came up to Chicago by a fruit boat to New Orleans instead of going round the long way. And, what with the war and one thing and another, I haven't been in shape to fix things up with her until now. And now, just as I am ready, I find out that she's tying a can to me.

"It's a funny thing. I was sore as hell when I read that lawyer's letter. Since she had waited all that while, I thought she might have waited a little longer. She might have, too, for that matter."

It was funny, Jennie tacitly agreed; funnier than he knew, to see him still nursing a grouch over the inconstancy his wife had shown in not waiting another year on

the end of twenty. But she checked an impulse to laugh at him openly and instead asked him, as soberly as she could manage, if he had any idea why Mrs. Greer was doing it.

"Oh, another man, I suppose," he said.

When she cried out incredulously at that he wanted to know why not. Wasn't it likely enough? "She's only forty-five or thereabouts. Probably doesn't look any older to speak of than she did at thirty. She wouldn't—a woman like Annabel—unless she's got fat. Some well-preserved widower of sixty-odd—there's enough of them like that out in Pasadena, God knows—has been making up to her. Bungalow stuff; roses and orange blossoms; warm nights! Lord, yes!"

He turned upon her with an impish gleam in his eye.

"Want to bet me a hundred dollars I haven't got it doped out right?" he asked.

"No," she said thoughtfully, "I don't believe I do."

She often made bets with Joe, and not infrequently collected them, too; but never when that gleam in his eye warned her that he was proposing a sure thing. Those hadn't been blind speculations of his about Annabel and her well-preserved widower. Somehow or other he'd managed to inform himself of the facts.

"When was it you got her lawyer's letter?" she asked.

"Oh, quite a while ago," he admitted. "Just before I started north."

"You aren't going to contest the divorce, are you?"

"Of course not," he grumbled. "What would I contest it for?—Oh, I haven't been putting detectives on her, if that's what you are getting at. Only, if you don't want to be walked on in a case like that, it's just as well to have something to bargain with. I had Nathan get in touch with a lawyer, a perfectly respectable chap, out in Pasadena, and asked him to look up the main facts, just so I'd know where I stood. There is a widower, all right, a retired Chautauqua lecturer with a weak throat. He's got a little lemon grove just outside Pasadena. I don't know whether he's got one eye on Annabel's money or not.

"—Oh, it isn't hers yet," he went on, answering Jennie's exclamation of surprise. "But it seems old man Fanning's done pretty well, especially in the last year or two. He always had a fancy for bum real-estate, and he had some in Los Angeles that they found oil on. It's nothing enormous, would run to a couple of hundred thousand perhaps. He'll be getting on in his seventies by now, so it's reasonable to suppose that Annabel will get it some day."

He got up with a spring, chucked the butt of his cigar into the fireplace, and flexed his arms. "Well, the lemon grower is welcome to Annabel, and the money, too, if he can get it. I hope he does. And she's welcome to him, as long as she doesn't try to get rough with me." But his minatory tone made so sharp a contrast with these benignant sentiments that Jennie looked up at him inquiringly.

"You mean if Annabel doesn't try to gouge you for too much alimony?" she asked.

He checked the movement he was making and scowled at her in a way that showed this wasn't what he had meant.

"No," he said, "I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking of the grounds for divorce she puts in her bill. I'll look bad enough at the best, but I won't be made to look any worse than necessary."

Why in the world, Jennie wondered, should he care how he looked. It was plain that he did care tremendously. Not on his own account. It couldn't possibly be that. But who else was there to consider? For a moment, a wild notion of Henry Craven's sister flashed through her mind, to be dismissed as preposterous. Then came the real idea, the luminous surmise.

"Joe," she asked him suddenly, "did Annabel have a baby?"

3

She saw before he could answer that her shot had hit the mark. There was something likably boyish in the way it took him aback that she should guess, and in his transparent attempt to hide his dismay by minimizing her discovery.

"I should think you might have seen that long ago," he grumbled.

Well, she supposed she might have guessed. The existence of a child was the one answer to the enigma that had been puzzling her during the whole of his recital. This was the one way by which a colorless, inconsiderable person like Annabel could leave her mark upon him. It was the simplest, most natural thing in the world.

"A boy or a girl?" she asked, when her mind had got into its stride again.

"God! If it had been a boy," said Joe, "I'd have gone back. I'd never have left a son of mine to be brought up by—Fannings. Being a girl, it seemed to belong to them more. But at that I almost went back, as I told you.

"Jennie, I never was so flabbergasted in my life as the day I got that letter, down in Lima, when I'd been away about a year. I'd written Annabel, asking her to come down and join me. She wrote back that she couldn't come, because she didn't think the climate would be good for 'baby'; and then she went on,—I remember her exact words,—'I guess you don't know about her. Her name is Beatrice and she is eight months old.'

"That eight months made it plain enough what had been the matter with her when I quit. Damn it! Why couldn't she have told me what was on the way? I'd have treated her more carefully, if I'd only understood. That's the good woman of it, I suppose. She and her mother are the only two of that sort I've ever known and I guess they weren't meant for the likes of me. I've always had an idea it was the mother's doing that Annabel kept it dark. She hoped I'd clear out. I was a Beelzebub to her, no less. Well, they put me in wrong that time; left me looking damned cheap and feeling cheaper than I looked."

Jennie had never seen him so deeply moved. Nor had she ever understood him so well. This new angle of vision gave the effect of substituting a stereoscopic view for a flat photograph.

The fact that he had a daughter, born in wedlock of a good woman, had been working in him all these years, a vital ferment. His desertion and neglect of her—of them—had remained an unhealed sore in his memory. The desertion hadn't been altogether his fault, but why had he persisted in his neglect? Well, that wasn't so hard to understand, either, when you knew Joe. He'd spoken, two or three times to-night, of his wish to do the handsome thing, to do it up brown. With him, it would have to be done that way or it couldn't be done at all. He couldn't, in any common or rational way, be a devoted husband and father; but by some sort of transformation scene, which the possession of a lot of money would make possible, he might become a sort of fairy god-father. And this was what he had been dreaming of, looking forward to, shying away from under a sense that the properties and the apparatus weren't ready yet. Another month—or year—and the scene could be bigger and more splendid. And too, most likely, there was a real shyness, a boyishness, behind it all which made him clutch at excuses for delay.

Yet Jennie found it easy to believe, to-night,—she was in a, for her, distinctly sentimental mood about him—that he had been hungry, all those years, for the very thing which a boyish perversity had driven him to flout, respectable domesticity, a wife, a daughter, an anchorage. It was, she guessed, the feeling that he had been cheated out of all that, having come so near attaining it, that had made him so restless and quarrelsome. If he'd had the luck to marry the right sort of woman . . .

She roused herself at the end of a long reflective silence to remark that Beatrice must, by now, be pretty near grown up.

"She's nineteen," he answered. "I've never known her exact birthday. I've always known about how old she was, though," he added.

"Don't you know at all what she's like? Haven't you any sort of picture of her?"

"Picture! Lord, no! I told that Pasadena lawyer to

try to get me one. But he hasn't succeeded; at least, it hasn't turned up yet. Why, I suppose she must be a good deal like Annabel. She's sure to have been brought up like that. Innocent. Well, that's the way to bring up a girl, all right. Do you know those old-fashioned bouquets that are coming into style again, with a paper frill around them? I suspect she's a good deal like that."

Looking up at him, near to tears with a sudden sympathy, she saw his face darken. It was so startling a change that she cried out, "Joe! What is it?"

"Can you see," he asked, "how that child has been brought up to think about me? They will have used me as the bad man to frighten her with. 'Your father will get you, if you're a naughty girl, Beatrice!'—God! I can hear old Ma Fanning say it. And now she's old enough to think for herself, a nice little girl like that, she probably turns cold all over when she thinks of me, afraid I may crop up and disgrace them all. Goes and gets into bed with her mother to be comforted. That may be the reason Annabel's given her for getting a divorce. Well, I suppose it's what I deserve, all right.

"But where I stick is at that damned widower, googling at the kid, pawing her, telling her he's her daddy now, holding her on his knee. Not if I know myself!"

"There you are, Jennie! Now we're down to brass tacks. If anybody's going to be that child's father, I am. That's what I wanted to put up to you to-night."

"You mean," she asked, after lighting a cigarette to give herself the appearance, at least, of calm reflection, "that you want to take her away from her mother altogether and bring her out here to live with you?"

"You've got it," he said. "That's the idea to a dot. I want you to help me figure out how it's to be done. She's of age, you want to remember; under California law. I looked it up."

He prowled restlessly about the room while she smoked half-way through her cigarette; then, with his familiar impatience, prodded her for results.

"What's the simplest way? That's the place to begin. And what's the objection to it? Come along. Think out loud. You'll have come as far as that."

"It's a crazy idea, Joe," she then burst out desperately. "I know how much you want her and how much you hate the other thing. But it can't be done. Even if you did get her to come to you, which I don't believe you could, what would you do with her when she was here? She couldn't live alone in this flat with you away half the time. And anyway, the sort of life you live . . ."

"Damn the sort of life I live!" he interrupted. "What's that got to do with her? It's never had anything to do with you, has it? And you've known me better than anybody else, for seven years. If I could be decent to you for that length of time, don't you think I could to my own daughter? It's *her* life that we're talking about. I tell you, nothing wrong would ever come within sighting distance of it. She'd never learn anything out of the way from me or from anything she ever saw me do. There'll never be any parties in *this* flat, Jennie. Not as long as she makes her home in it."

"She couldn't live here alone in it, anyhow. Not with you away half the time."

"I wouldn't try to keep her here all the time. I'd send her to school, for one thing. Williamson's got a daughter just about her age who's away at some boarding-school or other. I'll find out from him where it is and send Beatrice to the same place. That's a good idea. They'll make friends. It'll give Beatrice the right sort of start."

"There won't be any school till next September," Jennie pointed out. "This year's practically over now. And after the first of July you'll have to be up North most of the time."

He grappled with this difficulty for a moment; then faced her triumphantly with a solution.

"Henry Craven's persuaded his sister to take a cottage somewhere on Cape Cod this summer. He's worried about

her for some reason; thinks she needs a change. And the Aldrichs have offered to loan her their place. She's agreed to go for a couple of months if she can find somebody to go with her. Well, she could take Beatrice along, just as well as not, even if she does get somebody else, too. I could fix it so that the trip wouldn't have to cost Henry anything. She doesn't want to go till July, Henry says, but that will just give Beatrice and me a chance to start getting acquainted."

Jennie felt her mind going blank. What could you do with a man like that? She got herself together, chucked away her cigarette, and charged the position, head on. "Joe, you're wild," she said. "You can't do things like that—not outside your own office, you can't. They won't work. You haven't an idea, really, what the girl is like. You don't know a thing about her tastes or her ways. You don't know whether she'd like these people, or not.—Nor whether they'd like her."

"They'd better like her!" he retorted, half aloud. Then, with a laugh, "Look here, Jennie! Do you want to bet a thousand dollars, real money, that if I ask Miss Craven to take Beatrice under her wing for a few weeks, down East, she won't grab it like a trout? Come on, now. Don't be a crab unless you're willing to back your opinion."

Was that subtlety, she wondered, or naiveté? Had he just this moment blundered into it, or had he thought it all out, in that amazing brain of his, at their dinner, the night before? He being Joe, you never could be sure.

"No," she said, beaten; "I'm not taking any bets with you, to-night."

"Anyhow," he immediately went on, not stopping to gloat over her discomfiture, "this is all barking up the wrong tree. There's no argument whether we want the girl or not. The question is, how are we going to get her?"

"Go out there yourself and see her," she answered instantly.

He nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, that's the simplest thing. But it wouldn't do. First place, I'd scare her to death—just my looks, I mean. She mustn't see me until she's been told I'm not so bad as I look. Second place, if I was there, I couldn't get out of seeing Annabel, and if I ever got drawn into an argument with her and old man Fanning, let alone the widower, I'd spill all the beans. No, that's out. What's the next thing?"

Then, after a dubious pause, "I was wondering about you or Henry; which of you would be best to send out, for me, I mean."

At that, she laughed outright. "Send us both, Joe, together. We'd make a wonderful pair of kidnappers." Then, seriously and patiently, as one would deal with a little boy, she went on, "Anybody you sent in your place, Joe, would have to explain who they were and why they were mixed up in the business, and before they got through the whole thing would look like a crime and you'd look like an ogre. No, if you can't go yourself, you'll have to write a letter."

By the way he grumbled over this decision, she was able to guess that it was the one he himself had come to. But his manner of acquiescing in it took her once more by surprise. He went over to a desk in the corner of the room and came back with a pad and pencil which he put into her hand.

"All right," he said. "We'll do it now."

"You don't mean you're going to dictate it!" she exclaimed. "A letter like that?"

"It's the only way I can do it," he assured her. "I'll copy it out in my own handwriting after you've transcribed it. What's the matter? You haven't forgotten your pothooks, have you?"

"Oh, all right," she told him. "Go ahead."

He began: "'My dear little girl: This letter is from your father. I hope you won't stop reading though, until I have told you why I am writing. It's because I have just heard of your mother's plan to get a divorce from me

and marry again. I don't blame her for doing that, but it strikes me that the new scheme may leave you out in the cold, as it leaves me, and that maybe this is a good time for us to get acquainted.'

"I put that in," he paused to explain to Jennie whom he saw looking rather thoughtful over it, "on the off chance that Annabel hasn't told her the real reason. She may be keeping the marriage end of it dark. It would be easy enough to do with a kid like that."

Jennie nodded a little dubiously, but made no remark, and he went on.

"I don't know how much you have been told about me, but I realize that you must think of me as a pretty bad sort of person. From your mother's angle on it, I surely have been, and from yours, too. I've had a hard, rough life, full of ups and downs. I don't know that there's much use in telling you a thing you will find it so hard to believe, but it is true, nevertheless, that I have been thinking about you ever since I first knew I had a daughter, and have been wishing I could do for you the things that a father ought to do.

"I have only just got things in shape so I can. I am now the head of a big business and some of the biggest bankers and such in Chicago are associated with me. I have a good apartment at the above address and two motor-cars. I am sure I can make you comfortable, for a visit at least, and give you a good time. I don't ask for more than a visit until you have had time to decide whether you care enough for me to adopt me as your real father, or not."

Again he paused, and this time evidently in the grip of a real difficulty. "That's the devil of a letter," he burst out at last. "How do I know she'll get it? If Annabel sees it first, with a Chicago post-mark and all, she'll open it sure. And if she has been keeping her widower dark, the girl will never get a look in."

"There's this lawyer in Pasadena," Jennie suggested. "He seems to be a convenient sort of person."

Joe nodded, grinned and resumed dictation.

"'I'm sending this letter through my lawyer in Pasadena.' Wait, cut that out. 'You're welcome to show this letter to your mother. I am sending it through my lawyer in Pasadena only in order to make sure that you really get it and that you have a chance to decide the question for yourself. I think that, being nineteen years old, you are entitled to decide it that way, if you want to. I am also sending him a check for a thousand dollars, with instructions to pay you as much as you want of it for making the journey with.'"

"That's two or three times as much as she'll need," Jennie objected.

"I know it is," he said. "That's the only way I've got of showing her I'm not a piker. She'll take what she wants and he'll pay his bill out of the rest." He went on with the letter.

"I am hoping, before you come, to get hold of a photograph of you, so that I will know whom to be looking for when I meet the train. But I have an idea that I shall know anyway. I am not sending you a photograph of myself for fear it might frighten you. But I am not really so bad as I look. Perhaps you don't know I am fifty years old, five years older than your mother. I honestly believe you will never be sorry for having given me a chance to show you that I can be

"Your loving father."

"Write it out long-hand, will you, Jennie? Then I'll copy it and put it in the mail to-night."

It wasn't until she had finished this task that anything more was said between them. As she concluded it, she remarked, "That's a clever letter, Joe. But I wish . . ."

She broke off there with a resolute shake of the head, came over to where he was standing and took him impulsively by the shoulders. "I wish you luck, anyhow," she went on. "I hope it works. I hope she makes you happy."

Clearly, he was startled by the caress. She had never

done anything just like that to him before. He didn't respond to it with any gesture of his own, but his voice, when he spoke, had real emotion in it.

"God, Jennie! If I had had the luck to marry *you* twenty years ago," he said.—"Well, what are you grinning at?"

For she'd instantly stepped away from him at that, and the quality of her smile was derisive.

"Annabel wasn't the wife for you, for a fact," she admitted. "But you don't hate her, even now. And, oh, lord, how you would have hated me!"

He didn't very much relish this, but she, having got the upper hand of him again, pressed the point home. She lighted another cigarette and seated herself comfortably in his reading chair, before she spoke.

"The right wife for you," she said, "would have to be pretty, silky, way up in the society game. She ought to be a little afraid of you, so that she'd take care to keep you afraid of her. And you'd have to be proud, whenever you thought of it, that you'd *got* her."

She saw this go home to him. He flushed half angrily, and came a stride or two nearer.

"How much more do you know?" he demanded.

She leaned back a little in her chair, and smiled acceptance of his challenge. "You couldn't stand anybody," she added, "who knew you too well. You'd have to be wonderful to her all the time, and mysterious. Oh, I know, because that's the way I'd want a husband, if I had one, to feel about me."

"All right," he said. "You needn't rub it in any more. Look here, it's half past ten. You'd better be running along home. I'll telephone Burns to bring your car around."

She was mildly amused at his sudden concern for the proprieties, and she tried to tease him a little about it, but he insisted on treating the matter seriously.

"I don't want young Burns getting any funny ideas in his head about you. He's welcome to think what he

pleases about me, and about some of the people I play around with. I don't care a damn what he thinks. But I want *you* to be careful. Do you get that?"

"All right, Boss," she said, sounding very meek as she rose and went to find her wrap. "Sure I get it."

This final slant of the talk recalled her resolution regarding the boy, so while she and Joe stood in the corridor waiting for the car to come up, she told him she thought he ought to find something better for young Burns to do. "He's too good to be wasted driving actresses home from parties and that sort of thing."

"A little soft on him, are you?" Joe asked.

"Oh, I suppose so," she admitted. "I probably wouldn't have thought of it if he hadn't been so good-looking. But it's true all the same."

Joe contradicted her, amiably but flatly. "If he's too good for it," he went on to explain, "then it's just the job for him. He has good pay and short hours; the whole day to himself except what he needs to make up lost sleep in. If he wants to study or do anything else that's worth while, he has all the chance in the world. If I could have picked up a job like that at his age, I'd have blessed my luck. Of course, it's true that, if he isn't any good, he has a handsome chance to go to the devil. But that's no concern of mine."

By now, the elevator had come up and she stepped into it. "Are you sure it isn't?" she asked. "There's something in the Bible about the man who said he wasn't his brother's keeper."

"Yes," Joe acknowledged, with a grin. "That was Cain. But he wasn't being blamed for not having seen to it that Abel didn't eat too many green apples. He'd just murdered his brother and he was trying to establish an alibi. Didn't I tell you I knew the Bible? You want to look it up before you spring anything like that on me. Good night."

CHAPTER THREE

SILK

1

AROUND this time Joe got into a quarrel—not serious, except as all business quarrels are serious—with Gregory Corbett.

Gregory had undertaken for Corbett and Company the building of the machinery Joe had designed for the manufacture of raw flax. There was, altogether, quite a lot of it. The straw was to be handled directly from the farmers' wagons and fed into a crusher. After this preliminary crushing, it had to be spread and sprayed with the culture and conveyed to the bins. It was to be withdrawn from the bottoms of the bins after the retting was completed, and put through the drying, breaking and scutching processes necessary to get it ready for the mills.

The machinery was all, or nearly all, special work of a particularly fussy sort, and from a manufacturer's point of view it was not an attractive job. There were to be four of each sort of machine to equip the four warehouses which the company had contracted for in the Northwest. But it wasn't likely that any of these designs would ever be put into production on a really large scale.

Standardized production for an unlimited demand was the bright motto of Corbett and Company. You didn't mind how much time and money it took to get a thing right, provided when you did get it right you could sell ten million dollars' worth of it. There was no such prospect here. However, they were well equipped to do the

work, and, as a favor to the new company—this was his honest feeling about it—Gregory, at the April directors' meeting, agreed to take the job. Joe sent the drawings to Riverdale by special messenger that same day and started for the Northwest on the day following.

What happened is what always happens in such cases. The Corbett engineers out at Riverdale found numerous mistakes, or what they took to be mistakes, in Joe's drawings, and saw various improvements, or what they conceived to be improvements, on his designs. And, since Joe was not at hand for personal consultation, in some instances they made corrections on their own responsibility and went ahead, and in others simply waited for Joe's return. So when Joe came back along in May and went out to Riverdale to see how things were getting along, there was a first-class explosion.

Joe stood by his drawings. The "improvements" were ideas that he himself had rejected for good and sufficient reasons long ago. The few ambiguities that there were in his drawings were so obvious that any mechanical draughtsman with a teaspoonful of brains could have cleared them up at sight. The engineers out at Riverdale were a pack of congenital damn fools and vicious meddlers to boot. What they'd left undone was a crime, and what they'd done was worse, since it had simply to be undone again. Brown, Corbett's chief engineer, had to stand two hours of this, and Bailey, the general manager and first vice-president, another hour. All that saved Gregory was that he was out of town.

Joe went back, however, to his office and wrote Gregory an outrageous letter—behind Jennie MacArthur's back, since he knew she'd tone it down and he wanted it to be as insulting as possible. Its purport was that, if Corbett and Company weren't competent to do this work, he proposed to equip a shop and do it himself.

His object in all this—for Joe even in his tantrums usually had one—was merely to raise the temperature to the steaming point. His real indictment, unstated, was that

the Riverdale people had been fiddling with the job in a perfunctory way. He wanted to get everybody mad enough so that things would begin to hum and the lost time could be made up. And it was really a rush job by now, for it had got deep into May and the harvest that it was so necessary to be ready for was not many weeks away.

He was therefore seriously disconcerted to receive, in the course of a few days, a coldly polite letter from Gregory stating that Corbett and Company would be very glad to relinquish the contract. All work upon it had, by Gregory's orders, been stopped. Joe's drawings were baled up and ready for delivery to any messenger he might send, and he was welcome to execute them where and how he pleased.

One's own words don't make a pleasant diet for anybody, but for Joe to crawl down and apologize was almost impossible. So he appealed, or attempted to appeal, to John Williamson as a peacemaker. He telephoned John's office and was told he was out of town. His attempts to learn where John was were met merely by the information that Mr. Williamson had left no instructions for the forwarding of any message whatever. He expected to be back about the middle of next week. Even Rollie Mill, John's secretary, when Joe identified himself over the phone and explained that the matter was urgent, had nothing more satisfactory than that to offer. Joe jammed the telephone receiver down on its hook.

This was to him one of the most exasperating of the strange customs of financiers, the trouble they took to make themselves elusive and inaccessible. He couldn't make up his mind whether it was pure swagger, a trick to impress outsiders with their high-mightiness, or whether they were so soft-skinned that they felt the need of a lot of padding between themselves and the urgencies of life.

It was a great point of pride with Joe that his own door always stood open. Anybody who wanted to talk to him could walk straight up to him and say his say. If

it wasn't worth listening to, Joe chucked him out. And if he could do that, he believed anybody else could, who had enough real ability to hold down his job. The advantage of it was that you really knew what was going on, which you couldn't know if you surrounded yourself, like some scared lazy Oriental potentate, with a lot of grand viziers and eunuchs, all with their own fish to fry.

To this effect he freed his mind profanely and explosively to Henry Craven. "Here's an example of how badly it works," he went on. "I'm sure Williamson would want to know how we're being held up by Corbett's getting on his high horse like this. These days we're losing now out at Riverdale will be precious as hell before the summer's over; and Williamson could set it right in half an hour, if I could get through to him."

Henry at this point startled him by producing an idea. "Violet may know where John is," he suggested. "I can call her up and see."

Joe was inclined to stick at that. "I guess I wouldn't mix his wife in it," he said uneasily. "We don't want to start anything."

Henry laughed at that idea. It was quite likely, he admitted, that she wouldn't know enough of her husband's whereabouts to do them any good, since they went about pretty independently of each other, but certainly there'd be no harm in trying.

And within an hour, quite triumphant, he brought to Joe's desk some items of information. He had pursued Violet by telephone from one point to another, and finally talked with her. She knew where John was, all right. He'd gone on a fishing excursion with Martin Whitney up to Martin's camp in northern Wisconsin. The name of the camp, she thought, was "Big Pine Lodge." It was a twenty-five mile drive from the nearest railroad and telegraph station. But, unfortunately, she couldn't remember the name of the station, though she'd heard it often enough. Frederica—this was Martin's wife—was out of town, in the East somewhere, but his eight-year-old

boy, Peter, might know; somebody at the Whitney house would, certainly, or Martin's brother-in-law, Rodney Aldrich, who went up there sometimes. But it took about twenty-four hours to get a telegram through, and Violet thought John would be back about Tuesday, anyhow.

And would Joe like Henry to telephone Aldrich, or would he do it himself?

"We'll neither of us telephone," Joe answered positively. "I hate like hell to wait till Tuesday, but we'll let it lay right there just as it is. Oh, it's where she thinks he is, all right, but it sounds like an alibi to me. I wonder," he added with a grin, "if that isn't the way the word fishy got started."

When Joe, by appointment, saw John Williamson at two o'clock on the next Wednesday afternoon, he had to admit that in this particular case, without prejudice to the general principle, he had been wrong. There was no doubt at all that Williamson had been fishing. For the first fifteen minutes, Joe could do nothing but listen to the banker's summary of his piscatorial triumphs; the number of trout taken, the gross weight of the catch, the size of the biggest one, the duration in minutes of some of the mightiest combats, stratagems employed by both sides and so on. He had had four wonderful days and he made it plain that he considered it an act of Spartan virtue to have come back to the grind of business when he did. Well,—and what was the row with Gregory all about, anyway?

Joe couldn't complain of his manner of dealing with the business, once he had brought his mind around to it. It was likely he'd already heard Corbett's version of the affair, and had come to his own conclusion—probably that Joe had made a damned fool of himself. But he betrayed no feeling of this sort. Confound him, though, why shouldn't he, if that was what he thought? They weren't ladies at a tea party. They were two men trying to get down to brass tacks. But, after listening with a good appearance of sympathy to Joe's tale, he really gathered the thing up pretty well.

"I take it then, you never had any idea of taking the job away from Corbett and Company, and never meant Greg to think you had. And that all you want now is to have them go ahead the way they started."

Joe nodded. That was about it. Corbett had taken literally a phrase that had been meant merely to jazz things up a bit. "Because, damn it, they weren't getting started at all. It's almost June, now, and they haven't started yet. But we haven't any alternative. I'll do anything you say. If he wants an apology to soothe his feelings, you can dictate anything you like and I'll sign it."

"Oh, Corbett's all right," the banker said in a tone which struck Joe as subtly rebuking that last suggestion of his. "That plant out at Riverdale is his religion, in a way, and criticism of it makes him sore. I'll see him today—was going to, anyhow, on another matter—and I'll straighten things out."

This was all Joe wanted, and he made a move to rise from his chair when he saw that the financier had something more to say, and sat back again.

"I should think that you'd take things a bit easier now that everything is going on the rails;—take time for a little fun. Don't you ever fish?"

There was a stall-fed idea for you! "Everything on the rails!" Let George do it. Even the Corbett difficulty would have taken care of itself. Would never have arisen, Williamson evidently thought, if Joe hadn't meddled.

He suppressed this line of thought without even the flicker of a grin for its expression, and told the financier that there had been times in his life when he had fished assiduously. "I've netted 'em, speared 'em, hooked 'em with hooks I've made myself out of turkey bones; I've even caught 'em bare-handed. That's a poacher's trick. Did you ever hear of tickling trout? But I hope I never have to catch another. I've had enough of nature and the wilds, roughing it, sleeping on the ground on the

weather side of a camp-fire, sitting in the wet bottom of a canoe all day. You see, I've done all that—in earnest. So now I want things smooth; just as comfortable as I can get them."

Williamson got the idea. The man wasn't dull or, exactly, slow-witted. It was just that he'd never had enough experience of the real life-or-death sort to know the feel of naked reality. He went on, good-humoredly, to set right some of Joe's misconceptions of the sport of fishing as practised at Martin Whitney's camp.

Whitney had a bully house; built of logs but just as comfortable as his house in town. And you were just as well looked after. There was a big family: man and wife, grown sons and daughters, a sprinkling of grandchildren, who lived on the place the year round and took care of it. You sent word you were coming a day or two ahead, and you found fires going, beds made, water turned on, everything. The place was wild, all right—there were bear, deer, all sorts of things to be found on it—but the trails were so well kept up that it was perfectly easy to go wherever you liked. And there was always a boy ready to act as guide. The woods and waters were all carefully preserved, the whole place patrolled, and Martin's own hatcheries had been going long enough so that the fishing was practically a sure thing. You simply couldn't have a bad day. And when you got home at the end of it, you sat down to a dinner that they'd be proud to serve at the Blackstone; trout, a roast mallard apiece . . .

"Wild duck at this time of year?" Joe asked. "Where are the game wardens in these parts? Or are they afraid of as big a man as Whitney?"

"No, it's all right," Williamson insisted. "Whitney breeds them up there. One of the boys on the place started doing it just for a stunt, but Whitney saw the value of the idea and regularly went in for it. They've got a big enclosure—have to keep their wings clipped, of course, and feed them the right sort of stuff;—I think they taste better, for a fact, than the wild mallards."

Stall-fed, by God—even the wild ducks! Joe didn't say it aloud, but the thought jolted a laugh out of him.

"Oh, I know it sounds funny," said Williamson (he didn't though; at least he didn't know why), "but it's a great idea all the same. The point is, you have them when you want 'em."

"Well, that's an important point, all right," Joe remarked, getting out of his chair. "I wish you'd rub it into Corbett until he appreciates it, too. I used the wrong words in my letter to him, and I'm willing to take 'em back. But the sense of that letter was right and I don't take it back for a minute. It'll make an enormous difference whether we have that machinery ready when we want it or not, and that's up to him. It can be done, even now, but he'll have to forget some of his dignity and start a sweat."

The banker had stayed in his chair and now, for a minute before he answered, he drummed thoughtfully with his fingers upon the desk. "Look here, Greer," he said at last. "I've known Gregory Corbett a long time—always, you may say. I knew his grandfather. I think you've got the idea that he's a pompous ass. At least that he's acted that way about this. Well, he isn't. You've got him wrong. He's a damned able fellow. If you really sell him a proposition, get him enthusiastic over it, he's a whirlwind. But if you get him sore, he's a bull-head. You'll have to get together with him on this if the thing is going to work."

"He's put his own money into it," Joe observed. "Can't he see where his own interest lies?"

"That isn't enough," the banker insisted. "After all, he isn't in so very deep. But if you and he got together in a friendly way over it . . . I was just thinking. Have you ever done any trap-shooting? Clay pigeons, you know. He and I shoot a few frames almost every Sunday morning. We both get up early and he comes over and has breakfast with me, and then we go out to the traps and see what sort of an eye we've got.

Put a quarter a bird on it just to make it amusing.—Why don't you drive up, next Sunday, and join us?"

It was touch and go, for a matter of seconds, whether Joe wouldn't tell him to go to hell and take his clay pigeons with him. Was it worth any real man's while, trying to work in harness with a fudging, trifling lot like this? With their pretended sports, catching stall-fed fish, shooting clay birds! Pretended gambling to keep them amused! Twenty-five cents a bird—to millionaires! And having to be coddled into a good temper before they'd attend to what was their own business!

It was, Joe decided afterward, a matter of pure chance that tipped the beam. He had, instinctively, turned away from the banker in that first moment of exasperation, and what came under his eye was a framed chalk drawing hanging alone on the wall, a portrait by Helleu of a young girl. Joe didn't really look at it until the financier, glancing round to learn why he didn't answer, saw where his gaze was fixed.

"That's my daughter," he said. "They tell me it isn't as good, artistically, as another he did of her, but it looks like her, all right. It did, anyhow, two years ago when it was done."

It was beautiful, Joe thought, and he said so, his mood and intent changing with the suddenness of an alternating current as he spoke. When Beatrice came (he felt sure she would come, though he'd heard nothing as yet, either from her or from the lawyer), he'd have a man as good as that do a picture of her. And this girl on the wall was the one he'd picked out to be his girl's friend. A charming young thing she was, too, though a bit disconcerting, somehow. And he, with that damned temper of his, had been on the point of wrecking the whole plan, just when Williamson was making his first really friendly advances. (For it hadn't escaped Joe's attention that the banker had never, up to now, asked him to his house. They'd lunched together two or three times at clubs and restaurants.) After all, he'd gone into the china shop of his own free will, hadn't he? Then why should he act like a bull?

He walked over to Williamson, holding out his hand. "You're right all the way through," he said. "I'll try to slow down and take it a bit easier. And I'll be glad to come up Sunday morning. What do you mean by early? Six o'clock?"

"Lord, no!" gasped the banker. "Why, we usually have breakfast about eight-thirty. It won't matter if you're late."

"I won't be," Joe assured him, "but I'm likely to be hungry. Driving before breakfast always gives me an appetite like a wolf. You'd better tell me how to find the place, though."

2

The direct business result of the Sunday morning trap-shooting was negligible. It was forestalled, indeed, by an action of Jennie MacArthur's. As soon as Williamson telephoned that Corbett and Company would go ahead with the execution of the order, she wrote Gregory an adroit letter which she persuaded Joe to sign. It had the look of a proffered compromise, since it pointed out that the need for the more complicated machinery, for the processing of the flax after it had been retted, was much less urgent than for the unloading, crushing and conveying machinery, which if they were to avoid heavy losses must be ready when the flax was. It was written in a perfect imitation of Joe's best vein, offhand, vigorous, shot with a gleam of good-humored extravagance.

"You're a wonder, Jennie," Joe said as he read it. "I swear I'll never do it again." Write a letter behind her back, he meant. He had made that promise before, as her smile reminded him. "I mean it this time," he asserted, as he signed the letter.

It brought an immediate response from Corbett, a little stiff in its phraseology—for he had no such executive officer as Jennie at his right hand—but satisfactory in purport. The receiving machinery, at least, would be ready as soon as the flax was.

Consequently, when the two men met in John Williamson's gun-room, a mere word or two in addition to a mu-

tually amiable greeting was all the business needed. Further than that they were never likely to go. Indeed, Gregory's attempt at amends, a handsome reference to the generosity of Joe's letter, rubbed him a little the wrong way, since it was Jennie who deserved the credit of it.

But if the direct result of that Sunday morning excursion was unimportant, its by-products were not. The ideas and impressions which Joe began collecting, from the moment he drove through the great wrought-iron gates which guarded John Williamson's estate, produced on him a profound effect.

It was not Joe's way to formulate expectations, and still less to go back to them afterward and compare them with realities. All his emotional ideas were hazy. His notions of the business life of a man like John Williamson he had revealed to Henry Craven. Here was somebody with no idea what the wealth he had inherited was for, laboriously making more work for himself by increasing, year by year, an income already unmanageably big.

His notion of the domestic life of a man like that was cut off the same piece of goods. He fancied John at home as the slave to the senseless elaborations of his own, or his wife's, extravagance; living a life of stiff, uneasy ceremony, stifled by the meaningless assiduities of servants,—the object, on the whole, of contempt rather than envy. He had got it, if anywhere, from the movies, though he did not, of course, take literally the paranoiac inanities of the cinemas;—no more than he took literally the comic shrimp in the colored supplement of one of the Sunday papers, whose millions inspired a ferocious determination in his wife to "bring him up" to grotesque standards of propriety and to dissociate him utterly from the companions of his choice. Henry Craven, though, had pretty distinctly intimated, Joe thought, that John Williamson's wife had made a point, during the early years of their married life, of bringing up John. So, though he did not expect to be affronted, when he presented himself at the breakfast table, by a brandished rolling-pin,

he did entertain, vaguely, the notion of a woman elaborately gowned whose hauteur, equaling that of her butler, he might find rather trying.

Up to the moment when he entered the gun-room, there had been nothing decisive to confirm or to belie his expectations. The house was as big as he had supposed it would be, and it stood, he guessed, the better part of half a mile back from the road. But it hadn't, when he got inside, at all the look of a hotel, and the only servant he saw, unless one counted the lodge-keeper who'd opened the great gate for him, was the pleasant young fellow whom, upon pulling up at the carriage door, he had found on the steps to receive him.

Did he care to have his car taken into the garage? It was quite all right where it stood at the side of the drive, unless it should come on to rain, and it looked at last as if we could count on a fine morning. The gentleman was expected in the gun-room,—whither this friendly guide now proceeded to conduct him.

John Williamson in the gun-room was, it is hardly too much to say, a revelation to Joe. The room itself had something to do with it. It was comfortable and masculine and shabby. The fender around the fireplace, a broad seat upholstered in red leather, was scarred by the heels of innumerable boots. The shallow cupboards, whose unglazed walnut doors paneled both the flanking walls, had a look of use and of diverse content, if one were to judge by the different sorts of keyholes one saw. And the keys, all the important little flat keys, would be in John's pocket, guarding—it would be fun to know what different sorts of treasures. The room opened straight outdoors on the ground level. The door stood open, as did the casement windows, and let in, undefaced by any woven wire screening, great splashes of sunshine upon the floor. Without, the turf as thick and short and firm as the pile of a carpet came right up to the stone sill.

Joe knew without any telling, in his first glance through that open door, that everything he could see belonged to

Williamson. It struck him quite convincingly, though he didn't stop to rationalize it, that nothing of his own, or hardly anything, belonged to him in quite so ample and secure a sense. And from the moment when the banker, hearing him come in and emerging from his Sunday newspaper (he was rather shabbily dressed in a pair of old knickerbockers and a soiled white sweater, and it was perfectly apparent that the opinion of no human being upon the propriety of his costume would interest him in the least), rose and came over to greet him, Joe began to perceive that Williamson here in his place—his fortress, if you liked—was a different man; friendlier, perhaps, on the surface—that was just hospitality—but underneath more arrogant. And, perhaps, formidable? The question rang in Joe's mind like a tap on a big bell. He answered it with a grin. All the better if the stall-fed could show a little redder blood than he had credited them with.

Corbett, who came walking across the lawn to the gun-room door just about then, had a new look about him, too. Joe had never seen him before except in business clothes. He was dressed now in knickerbockers, a sport shirt and a sleeveless shooting vest, unbuttoned, and the sight of his neck and forearms gave Joe something more to think about. He wasn't used to having to concede an unquestionable physical superiority to those in whose company he found himself. He'd often thought of Gregory as some one out of whom it would be fun to take a fall. Here was a misconception thoroughly corrected. The man's strength was evidently prodigious.

Joe said as he shook hands with him, "I'd never have written that letter if I'd seen you first with your coat off."

"I might have kept my shirt on, though," Corbett replied, and blinked as if in surprise at the unforeseen witicism. He added, seriously and a little stiffly, his appreciation of Joe's second letter, and said he didn't believe there'd be anything more to complain of in Corbett and Company's execution of the order.

Business wasn't mentioned again all the morning. During the intermissions of a casual but excellent breakfast, the talk divided itself equally between professional baseball which, it seemed, had long been a hobby of Williamson, and the important question of the moment, namely, which of the three or four available guns Joe had better take out to the traps with him.

They weren't at all put off by Joe's rather pointed unconcern. Indeed, after he had confessed that he had never fired a shotgun in his life, and couldn't see that it mattered a damn what sort of lock, stock or barrel the thing had, they took their responsibilities all the more seriously. He might, he protested, have been going out after a tiger.

At the traps, he watched derisively while Williamson scored twenty-two hits out of twenty-five chances and Corbett, twenty-four. It was almost too absurd, he thought, to be credible. You stood at a known range, eighteen yards. You held your gun at your shoulder. You said, "Pull!" to the keeper, or whatever they called him. He pulled, and the skimming target flew off at one of three predetermined angles, in rotation! And you blazed away at it with a shell containing two ounces of bird-shot! His own failure to score more than six out of a possible twenty-five didn't raise his opinion of the sport, so very much, either. When he had finished his frame, he laid his gun in the rack and told the servant that he'd manage the lever while the man went to his motor and fetched an automatic pistol and a case of cartridges which he'd find in the left front door pocket.

His impression was that both the other men regarded this proposal, to pot at clay pigeons with a pistol, as indecorous but nevertheless amusing, and it was with a boyish air of guilt that they drew up, when his turn came, to see what sort of luck he had. He moved up to a five-yard range and told the man at the lever to pull whenever he liked. "Fool me if you can," he added. "Get the idea?"

This was, of course, an idea that no well-trained servant could possibly execute, so, after a trial or two, Williamson

relieved him. Joe managed to smash eight out of the frame, which both the others agreed was extraordinary shooting. Williamson taking his turn, with Joe at the lever, got none. As he turned away, he offered the pistol to Corbett. "This man's supposed to be the best revolver shot in Lake County," he explained. "He'll give you a better run for your money." But Corbett thought he wouldn't try it that morning. "Throw me off my draw," he explained. "Looks no end of fun, though."

Joe, blazing away again in his turn, was startled by a new voice—a woman's, speaking from close by.

"Is this Chateau Thierry, or what?"

He spun round and looked, and his first thought was that this was the girl whose portrait, in chalk, he'd seen in Williamson's office. The next moment, she cut cleanly through the jumbled situation—created by Corbett's greeting her as Violet and asking why she was up at this hour of the morning, and some superfluous sort of answer to her question attempted by Williamson—by holding out a decisive hand to Joe and saying:

"I know you're Mr. Greer. I'm Mrs. Williamson."

She wasn't excessively small, but his first impression of her, nevertheless, was as something jewel-like, finished out to an incredible perfection in detail, and, despite the rough texture and non-fitting cut of the sport suit she affected, he felt a sensuous silkiness about her which these contrasts perhaps heightened. And she was Williamson's wife. Good lord! She couldn't be the mother of that girl in the picture, could she? The resemblance seemed to prove it. It needed her laugh and the withdrawal, not brisk though, of her hand, to remind him that he had been staring.

"I suppose you'd like to shoot *me* for interrupting," she said; "but you've no idea how—weird it was to hear a rattle like this coming from the traps. Golf and billiards and bridge are solemn enough, but they're nothing compared to these Sunday morning clay pigeons. This looks like fun. D'you suppose I could hit one?"

So she stayed, and took her turn; actually managed to smash two targets. It wasn't long before they'd shot away all the cartridges. By that time, Joe had become aware that the other two men were getting remote; not hostile, he thought, but he couldn't be sure. Did they resent a certain lack of ceremony between him and the woman? Wasn't she supposed to have appeared at all? And shouldn't he, according to their ideas, have met her half-way? But she, sensing the new atmosphere herself, spoke out about it.

"These two men," she said to Joe, "are feeling ashamed of themselves, now that I've caught them playing hookey, and they're getting ready to be very severe to make up for it. Do you want to stay with them and shoot, properly, or do you want to come and walk with me? You haven't seen the place, have you?"

3

Violet Williamson, during the two hours or so that were left of that Sunday morning, not so much stirred Joe, though she did that, too, as stirred him up; agitated a lot of thoroughly precipitated ideas which had been lying undisturbed in the bottom of his mind for a long time, and set them afloat. She belonged, he decided, in a category the existence of which he'd never suspected; she thrilled him with a sense of discovery.

The women he'd known, aside from those who, like Bunny and Yvette, frankly made a living out of their sex appeal, and from the other lot, the more or less de-feminized ones, worker bees,—a type which Jennie MacArthur presented herself as an interesting variant from,—the women he'd known aside from these (who were alike in the important respect that they had to look out for themselves) were two other sorts, alike in the fact that they didn't. There were the "good" women, as he'd called them in talking to Jennie of Annabel and her mother, innocent, narrow-minded, domestic, to whom he conceded at least an academic admiration and respect; and another sort for whom he felt nothing but a profound contempt.

These were the wives of the prosperous nomad class to which Joe, in default of anything better, had socially attached himself. The men were well enough. They were usually good salesmen of bonds or real estate or insurance or automobiles. They could tell good stories and often had a real gift for repartee. They, with their wives, attended first nights; dined a good deal at the restaurants; frequented the socially broader-minded sort of country clubs, the women sticking pretty close to the verandas and the cardrooms. They lived in expensive apartments but they were always on the move. These women were, he thought, broadly speaking, no good. They dawdled and shopped; they went to the movies; they weren't good enough housekeepers to keep servants; they read the lighter sort of current fiction, and ate chocolate creams when they weren't in a panic about getting fat; they didn't have any children if they could help it. The source of most of their wit and, indeed, a good part of their conversation, in companies where both sexes were present, was the supposed tendency toward infidelity on the part of all married persons and the jealousy of the aggrieved member of the partnership. It was thought to be a great joke to split couples when going anywhere in taxicabs. All the teasing and ragging was about this sort of thing. Every now and then, one of these jokes got taken seriously and flared up into a furious but half-histrionic quarrel. Respectable kept women, that's what they were. And their weak but febrile clutch upon respectability was the thing about them which irritated Joe the worst.

Without having given very much thought to the matter, he had assumed that the wives of his new stall-fed associates were cut off pretty much the same piece of goods. They'd be better kept, of course; they were out of the precarious zone of ups-and-downs; their luxuries would be a realer thing, not a matter of carefully contrived appearances. But that they were, in fiber, as soft and slack and irresolute, he'd never seriously doubted.

Violet began uprooting these preconceptions in the first moments of their encounter. That the mother of a grown

girl could look like that, and move around like that, was an amazing phenomenon, to begin with. Her taking the automatic, with no ornamental feminine flutters or squeals, and bagging a couple of targets was unexpected too, as was her matter-of-fact way, a few minutes later, of carrying him off from her husband. She did this without a smile, with no parade of tacties, without the remotest reference, by glance or gesture, to the possibility that John Williamson mightn't like to have his wife stroll off with a stranger whom he certainly hadn't taken the trouble to introduce to her. She got away with it perfectly. The other two men, as they resumed their guns, merely nodded pleasantly to him and said they'd see him later. They didn't again that morning, as it happened.

"You don't want to go around looking at the Holsteins, do you?" she asked, as they paused a moment at a low gate. "Or the Chester Whites, or the Black Anconas?" She added, as he hesitated, "If it were John taking you around, you'd have to, of course, but not with me."

He said he guessed not, and they didn't go through the gate.

He got the idea that she had some other objective, for there was nothing aimless about the way she guided him, and the pace was, considering that she was a woman and the morning warm, brisk. She knew how to walk and was properly shod and clad for it. Her homespun skirt was short and light, and outlined, with agreeable frankness, her straight, slender legs.

She let him see at once that she had been inquiring about him. Apparently she'd started Henry Craven retailing some of his jungle stories. He tried to follow this lead, but it went against the current of his thoughts and he didn't make much of it; felt rather tongue-tied, somehow, and a bit resentful, suspecting that she wanted him to exhibit himself as a curiosity, the wilder and queerer the better. A rather audacious speculation of hers about the number of cannibal princesses that he might have made love to didn't help matters either.

Joe found no amusement in skating on the thin ice of

innuendo about sex. He had a repertory of bawdy stories and there was a sort of woman in the world whom he occasionally told them to, but none of that sort were the wives of men he knew. He couldn't be sure whether John Williamson's wife had meant to invite him in that way, or not; her manner didn't suggest it. She didn't bridle, either, at the snub his silence administered, though she now fell silent, too. She'd flushed a little, but this might be due to the pace they were making and the warmth of the morning. There was something Diana-like, he thought, about her fineness and freedom of movement. She'd make a wonderful model for one of Troubetzkoy's figurines. They were going up a gentle acclivity, now, through a grove of big trees, she a pace or two ahead, and the dapple of sunlight and shade upon her heightened his impression of the huntress.

When they emerged from the grove, they were upon the crest of the low ridge, and what fell away before them was a wide expanse of lawn. The house was in full view, presenting its terrace and its long facade of Georgian windows. There was a swimming pool, its curb gleaming white like marble and the water in it, for some reason he didn't understand, showing turquoise. There were tennis courts marked out in startling white upon the green of the lawn, and two great umbrellas of orange and white. A garden, tumultuous in color, was just beyond.

Joe stopped and stood at gaze. "I'm glad you brought me up here," he said. He was aware she wasn't looking at it herself, but was watching him instead.

"Yes, this is the place to see it from," she said indifferently.

There was a hickory seat built round the trunk of a giant outlier of the grove, and with him she moved over to it. As soon as he was seated, however, she got up and, unceremoniously, sat upon the grass.

"You like it to look at," she said, "for a minute, like this, on a bright spring Sunday morning. And next month it will be even jollier, when the kids are all getting

home from school. The pool there will be alive with them, and the courts. The color's gorgeous, then, with the swimming things they wear and white arms and legs all over the place. It's a good show. You must come up and see it."

He began saying he'd like to, but she hadn't yet got to what was in her mind, and, with a bare nod, went on:

"Really, though, except as a show, to look at now and then, doesn't it bore you frantic? The whole thing, I mean,—our sort of thing, the sort of people we are?"

For a random shot, this came close home. He remembered his state of mind, three or four days ago, when Williamson had invited him to come up here; the opinions that would have come steaming out of him, if he hadn't managed, just in time, to clamp down the lid. That Williamson's wife should have asked him such a question was amazing.

"I don't know any of you very well," he answered, lamely. "I'm not bored now."

"Oh, I suppose it's too much to expect you to talk out," she said discontentedly. "Especially after I've been rubbing you the wrong way, as we came along just now." She overrode his gesture of protest. "Oh, yes, I did. You thought I was just asking silly questions, like a girl meeting her first actor. It wasn't that exactly, but it sounded like it."

He tried to tell her it hadn't struck him like that. His jungle experience was a long way back, and this morning it had seemed especially remote. He hadn't been able to get into the swing of it.

She nodded amiably. "Some time you'll feel like it," she said, "and then you'll tell me."

The implication that there were going to be times, ample unlimited times, for talking together like this, stirred him, half frightened him. He recalled, illogically, an observation of Jennie MacArthur. "The right wife for you," she'd said, "would have to be silky, way up in the society game. You'd have to be proud, whenever you thought

of it, that you'd *got* her." He felt the blood pringling in his forehead. She wasn't looking at him, though; she'd gone on, thoughtfully, talking. He listened as well as he could for looking at her. She'd taken off her hat and tossed it on the grass, and, with its obstructing brim out of the way, he could see, from the elevation of his bench, the perfect turn of her throat, and the pearly translucence of her skin where it was shaded by the thin blouse she wore.

"You keep going," she said, "from the time you're quite small, thinking that life's going to open out, somehow, like a door. And then some day you wake up and realize you're thirty-five or so, and that it doesn't mean to open out, at all; there isn't any door—not to the thing you're in. And then you hear about somebody who's never been shut up, in anything; somebody the whole world's always been open to. And you try to get people to tell you about him, people like John who can't understand him one little bit, themselves, and Henry and Margaret Craven—Margaret's *funny* about you.—You wonder what that kind of freedom feels like. I should think you'd feel," she looked around at him suddenly, "with us, you know, like a big moose, or something, that finds itself shut up in our pasture with the Holsteins."

She'd startled him again, this time into a laugh. It didn't occur to him as a possibility that her cousin Henry might have quoted that phrase of his about stall-fed people to her.

He saw that his laugh had annoyed her; more or less he understood why: he hadn't "played up."

"I guess freedom's always a thing we think some one else has," he commented. "It made me laugh that you should have thought of me like that. The two really different kinds of people in the world are the ones who have been hungry and the ones who haven't—I don't mean dieting, I mean against their will."

That brought her gaze round to him, a look of clear wonder in her eyes. "Have *you*?" she asked.

It launched him, that wondering look, into a vein of biography which would have afforded Jennie Mac-Arthur a grin. "You'd have to be wonderful to her all the time, and mysterious," Jennie had remarked, constructing that hypothetical wife for him. Perhaps if Joe had thought of that just now, he might have grinned, too, invisibly. But he didn't think of it; he wasn't quite conscious why he took the line he did. It was by mere instinct that he fed the appetite for wonder he saw in her. He didn't invent anything, at that,—or not much. It was only that the picture he showed her was as heavily cross-lighted as a bit of stage scenery.

It was the story of Ishmael, the son of Hagar, that he told her,— "his hand against every man and every man's hand against him." He'd found his real jungle, he said, in the streets and alleys, the lumber-camps and the foundry yards, of civilized society. He'd never belonged to any union, any organization of any sort. He'd got most of his jobs back in those years—the troubled, panicky, early 'nineties—working as a strike-breaker. He showed her what it meant to load pig-iron all day, a day being an eternity of ten hours; and then, before he could regain what shelter he called home, to have to evade, or outfight, the pickets,—to slink along in the shadows, alert for ambuscades, ready at any moment to fight or flee for his life.

She said very little while the tale went on, but that extra, jungle sense of his told him that she was completely plastic to it. She didn't look at him much,—sat staring off into vacancy; and this permitted his gaze to feed upon her at will. He devoured every line and contour of her. He could see the faint pulse at the base of her throat; he watched her breathe. It was thus, at last, that he lost the thread of his story and stopped.

She allowed this silence to lie unbroken between them for so long that he was upon the point of some banal apology for having talked so much about himself, when at last she spoke.

"Well, I bet you're glad it all happened. Because it

never beat you down. You never got meek and resigned, and you never turned Socialist, wanting to divide everything up, or anything silly like that. I suppose you didn't want it divided up; you wanted it all for yourself. So you went off to the jungle, the real jungle, and made your fortune somehow, and then you came back and showed them."

He didn't correct this chronological misconception of hers; the picture as she saw it accorded better with her mood. "It wasn't much of a fortune I made down there," he qualified. "Twenty-seven hundred dollars that I got for some curios I brought out with me in a bag and sold to a museum."

She frustrated a little touch of drama he'd prepared, by not asking him what the curios were. She got reluctantly to her feet. "You'll have to tell me about that next time," she said. "I know it would be like the *Arabian Nights*, and if I let you get started again, I'll sit here listening all day. I've got to drive over to the Stannards' at Lake Geneva for lunch, with John, and I suspect I'm horribly late, now.—Oh, that doesn't matter," she went on, across his attempt to express contrition. "He probably won't speak to me all the way, but that'll only give me more time to think about the things you've been telling me."

They were walking, now, she setting a very leisurely pace, down the slope toward the house.

"What I can't get over," she remarked, "is the places you must have been, the things you must have seen! I've never been in any place more exciting than St. Moritz or Paris."

"Well, you've got it on me there," he said. "I've never been to any of those places."

She stopped to stare at him. "You mean you've never been to Europe at all?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Never had time. I'll get around to it some day, of course."

She laughed. "I was just thinking," she explained, "that I'd like to be there when you do. Like to go along

and show it to you; see how it—took you. Oh, the galleries and the cathedrals and such, of course; but other things, too: Longchamp and Henley, and the Easter Week bull fights in Madrid."

"That's what Sorolla said," he told her.

She stopped again to stare. "Sorolla!"

He nodded. "Just what you said—that he'd like to see how I took it, the bull-ring and the Prado and all."

"When did you know Sorolla?" she demanded. Her laugh seemed to be directed at her own astonishment.

"When he was here. I bought a picture of his, one of those seashore things. I'd like you to see it sometime. It's better than the one they've got at the Institute. He painted a portrait of me, and then he wouldn't let me have it. Took it back to Spain with him. We got pretty well acquainted. I can talk Spanish, you see, better than English; politer anyhow."

She digested this in silence until they got to where his car was standing in the drive. Even then, she made no move to leave him.

"I'd commandeer you," she said, "and take you over to the Stannards', except that you'd be so bored you'd never forgive me."

He thought it best not to insist that he wouldn't be. He offered the excuse of work to do, and, getting into his car, seated himself at the wheel. "You will come to see the Sorolla sometime?" he asked. "Come to dinner, you and your husband?"

She accepted this invitation a little absently. Then promptly corrected her manner and told him, with polite enthusiasm, she'd love to. Still she lingered for a moment beside his car, her elbows on the door, one foot on the running-board. She asked him suddenly what he was smiling at.

"Speaking of bull fights reminded me, I fought a bull once myself. In the public square at Quito. I jumped over the barrier on a bet a girl had just made with me."

"Oh, go away!" she cried, releasing the car at last and

stepping back. "But come again. Soon. And telephone me when you want us for the dinner. John might forget."

Joe had lied to Violet in one minor particular; it hadn't been, directly, her reference to the bull fights in Madrid that had reminded him of the bull he fought at Quito, but her own attitude, during their moment of parting, while she lingered beside his car. That had brought back the young senora he'd made the bet with. His first serious love-affair had been with her. Eighteen, he must have been, or thereabouts; she couldn't have been more than a year or two older. And her husband had been much the same sort of stall-fed hidalgo—in Ecuador—as Williamson. There had been, he remembered, about that Castilian girl, the same quality of silkiness. And the same cool insolence. She'd regarded him as a barbarian—laughed at his rudimentary Spanish and at his Northern manners. But she'd come to him just the same. It was queer how vividly he remembered her. He hadn't thought of her in years.

He had driven all the way back to town, at a speed reckless of the prowling Sunday motor cop, before it occurred to him that he hadn't told Violet a word about Beatrice—on whose sole account he had accepted John Williamson's invitation in the first place. He didn't go on to admit that, from the moment of Violet's appearance at the traps, he'd forgotten all about his daughter. What he decided was that it was just as well he'd waited until he knew for sure the child was coming.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CUB

1

It was not on the cards that Joe should forget about his daughter for long. Within a day or two of his Sunday morning adventure at Lake Forest, he got a telegram from the serviceable lawyer at Pasadena, which brought Beatrice vividly into the foreground of his thoughts.

"Your daughter plans leaving at once," it read.
"Wants entire thousand dollars. Is this OK?"

Joe went off at half-cock over this. His letter had succeeded beyond his hopes. The girl was ready to come to him, at once! And now the whole thing was jeopardized by the timidity of a piking, small-town lawyer, afraid to let go the money that he had expected would pay his bill. If the child wanted the whole thousand to make her feel secure in setting out upon so vast an enterprise as this, she should have it. It had been precisely to give her that feeling of security, that Joe had offered it. The poor kid, since she was born, had probably never traveled farther than Yosemite or San Diego; probably had never spent a night on a Pullman. Chicago and Timbuctoo would seem about equally distant to her. And here was this fool lawyer making difficulties, asking for instructions. He should have some, that he'd remember perhaps till next time! So there was a good deal of pepper in the telegram which Joe despatched in reply.

"Instructions carried out. Have written," the lawyer wired the next day, and Joe began looking out for a tele-

gram from Beatrice herself. None came, and the misgiving deepened in his mind that he'd have done well to give a second thought to that hasty conclusion of his and, perhaps, to consult Jennie MacArthur about it. He did not mention the matter to her until the lawyer's letter came in, just within the week. That really frightened him. It began with the startling assumption that the girl was already in Chicago with her father.

"Your daughter has, I trust, by this time told you, in substance, the manner in which the instructions in your letter of the thirteenth instant have been carried out.

"I was not able, until two days ago, to get into confidential communication with her without incurring the risk of my intention becoming known in other quarters. She came, however, by appointment, to my office, yesterday about four o'clock, and read your letter to her in my presence. She was greatly excited by it, so much so, indeed, that she found herself unable to read it, and put it into my hands to read to her. She declared her intention of starting at once and even demurred to returning to her home for the night, professing a fear that something might happen to prevent her going altogether. She also demanded the entire thousand dollars in cash, which I took to be contrary to the expectation expressed in your instructions. I ventured to point out to her your implied wish that she consult, or at least inform, her mother in the matter; but this, with the utmost vehemence, she refused to do. I then took refuge in the assertion of my inability to provide a thousand dollars in cash until the banks should open the next morning, and to this enforced delay she consented.

"I telegraphed you at once and your reply, as you no doubt remember, left me no discretion. So when she called at my office, at eleven o'clock this morning, I paid her the thousand dollars in currency. I must now consider my responsibility in the matter discharged.

"One minor matter remains, however, to be mentioned. She brought me, this morning, a photograph of herself, which she inscribed to you at my desk, asking me at the same time to mail it to you. I pointed out to her that

since she was leaving for Chicago that day, as I understood it to be her intention to do, the photograph would reach you some days sooner if she carried it herself. She insisted, nevertheless, and quite without explanation, that I mail it to you as she requested, which I am doing under separate cover.

"She declined my offers to procure her ticket and accommodation, and to have her accompanied to the train. I trust I am unwarranted in making the assumption that she had some other destination than Chicago, immediately, at least, in mind."

The letter disturbed Joe so profoundly that, when Jennie had read it (he had called her into the private office for the purpose, the moment she arrived the next morning), he made no attempt to shift from his own shoulders the blame for what he feared had happened. Indeed, when Jennie said of the lawyer, "He ought to have known better than let her go like that," Joe contradicted her.

"I'm the only damn fool in this business," he said. "I wired him in so many words to tend to his. The only question now is, what's to be done. Whether to wire him to try to have her found, or to go out myself on the next train."

"Neither would do any good," Jennie reflected. "The only thing you can do for the present is to telegraph your wife what you've done, or else have the lawyer talk to her. She may have some clue where the girl's gone, or she may be frantic without one; but in either case it's up to you to tell her."

Joe mopped the sweat from his forehead. "Yes," he admitted gravely, "I suppose it is." And this humility was so unlike him that Jennie set about finding what comfort she could for him.

It wasn't likely the girl had come to any actual harm; at least not to anything she herself would regard in that light. Joe's thousand dollars had probably come down from heaven to make possible the realization of some dream of hers, and she'd simply snatched at it. She'd

write to him when she got around to it. It might be a silly dream, of course; she might have gone no farther than Hollywood for a plunge into the movies, or eloped with some boy lover of hers. Anyhow, Joe had accomplished part of his purpose: Annabel's lemon-grower was deprived of the chance, which in prospect had so infuriated Joe, of being a father to the girl.

But, even in this aspect of the affair, Joe found no consolation, and for the rest, he protested that Jennie had it doped out all wrong. An innocent simple-minded little thing, such as Annabel's daughter would have been brought up to be, wouldn't be capable of thinking of going into the movies; and as for a schoolboy lover . . . He didn't see how Jennie could entertain an idea like that. Why, the kid was only nineteen!

"You were down in the jungle by then," Jennie remarked.

"But, damn it," Joe cried, "she's a girl!"

But when the photograph came to hand, as it did a day or two later, he was forced to admit the possibility that Jennie was nearer right than he. The force of the emotion that seized him when he found the package on his hall table and realized what it must contain, literally turned him a bit giddy. He ripped away the wrappings with hands that shook, but, before he opened the big brown mount, he carried it into the next room and sat down.

It was with clear incredulity that he stared, for the first minute, at the pictured woman it revealed. For it was as a woman that he first saw her. She was looking straight at him, very insolently, from under her heavy black lashes, her head somewhat tilted back for the purpose. Her black hair lost itself in the shadows of the dark ground. It was what photographers speak of as a "fancy" head, her naked shoulders and bosom emerging from a vignette of enveloping tulle.

It wasn't until later that he perceived the pathetic pretense there was about all this; that the insolence, the shamelessness, the world-weary sophistication, were, after

all, the mere imposture of a child. She had inscribed herself across one of the bare shoulders, with a fine swing of bravado: "Your devoted daughter, Beatrice." And underneath, she'd written in smaller characters: "Not a wise enough child to know her own father. Not yet, but soon."

He spent the whole evening alone with it in a tangle of violently contradictory emotions. He was angry and a little ashamed; he was quite inordinately proud; he was furiously jealous. For whom had she had that picture taken? Not for him, he knew; the time had been too short. He felt sure it was one the girl's mother had never seen, let alone authorized. No, she'd had it taken for some man,—some movie actor, some hotel clerk. There'd be plenty of masculine admiration for a girl who looked like that. She was quite extravagantly pretty. It was a short broad boyish face, with a wide expressive mouth and a real nose. There wasn't the slightest look of Annabel about her. She was his, every drop of her. She was nineteen years old, and this outrageous thing, with its vampire stare and its pert inscription (he hadn't missed the irony of that scrawled "devoted"), was his first communication, his first knowledge of her. The Beatrice he'd sentimentalized over all these years, the old-fashioned bouquet with the paper frill about it that he'd told Jennie about, was blown away like a wraith. This girl was flesh of his flesh.

And, in all likelihood, he'd lost her!

When Jennie saw the photograph, she laughed. "Any one who'd ever seen you would know who her father was, without any telling."

An actual physical likeness hadn't struck Joe, and he professed himself skeptical about it.

"No, she's you all over," Jennie insisted. "I'll leave it to anybody. Let me show it to Henry; see what he says."

But Joe, instead of handing it over to her, rewapped it thoughtfully in the paper from which he'd just taken

it. "I didn't think I'd say anything about her to Henry," he explained, "until I knew for sure whether she was coming, or not."

"She'll come," Jennie said confidently. "She says so, right there on the photograph. And then,—well, of course, she'd come anyway. I guess you'll find she's like you in a good deal more than looks. She's probably an explorer, just like you. Willing to take a chance to find out about things,—especially anything as exciting as a father she's never seen and they've told her she mustn't ask about. She's having some little fling of her own first, but she'll come."

"But what kind of a fling, that's the point," Joe put in somberly. "Damn it, Jennie! If she's come to harm with that fool thousand dollars . . ."

"She hasn't," Jennie assured him. "She won't commit herself to anything, or anybody,—not even a movie actor—till she's found out what *you're* like. Any more than you would, yourself. I tell you she's like you."

"Well, I hope you're right," he said. "It'll simplify things quite a bit, if you are."

"Simplify?" She looked at him thoughtfully. "Well, perhaps. If you can manage not to forget it's true. That must be a pretty hard sort of thing to remember, though."

He didn't see just what she meant by that, but he forbore to ask. Her confidence that the girl would, ultimately, turn up, intact and unencumbered with a movie-actor or bell-hop husband, really comforted him, and enabled him to dismiss the worst of the worry about Beatrice from his mind, even though reverberations of the emotional earthquake in Pasadena reached him daily in the form of telegrams.

He did mention to Henry Craven, by way of preparing the ground, that he was more than half expecting a visit soon from his daughter. He added no explanations, and Henry, though visibly bulging with questions, was too polite to ask them. To Henry's sister, Margaret, a few days later, he was a little more communicative.

The occasion for this was a supper party, instead of the dinner he'd originally planned, for the Williamsons. A small and, to Joe's ideas, a rather tame supper party, though it included a few stage people of the better sort; Jimmy Wallace, a dramatic critic; and a bachelor portrait painter, named Burton. The others were John Williamson and his wife, and Henry and Margaret Craven. The brother and sister happened to be the first arrivals. It was not their first visit to Joe's apartment,—in Henry's case, not by several. He, on coming into the drawing-room, sat down at once, unceremoniously, at the piano, and he continued amusing himself with it, in a fragmentary, meditative sort of way, after Margaret had returned from the room designated by Joe—his own—where she had left her wraps.

"I've just been looking at a photograph," she said. "I wondered . . ."

"Yes, that's Beatrice," Joe answered the unstated question. "I meant Henry to tell you. I'm expecting her in a few days. I've not seen her in—years. You see, my wife's been living in California for a long time, and the girl has been out there with her."

Margaret smiled. "I hadn't even known," she said, "that you were married."

Joe looked at her squarely. "I shan't be very much longer," he told her. "She's getting a divorce. Means to marry again, I understand. Well, it's right enough she should. We split up years ago."

"It must be delightful," Margaret said evenly, "to have a grown-up daughter coming to make one a visit. Especially a—delicious young thing like that."

"She's younger than she looks in that picture," Joe commented soberly. "Only nineteen. Of course she'll be sort of a cat in a strange garret, at first. I thought I'd like to bring her around to see you, if you'd let me."

For no longer than a breath, his appeal remained unanswered. Then, with a fully adequate cordiality, Margaret said she'd love to know the girl.

Late that night, after the party—a thoroughly successful one—had broken up, as Joe was undressing, he observed that the photograph, which he had left standing open on his dressing-table, had been closed and laid down, the flap of the mount even tucked under it to keep it from springing. He wondered if Margaret Craven had done that, and, if so, why. It might, of course, have been a sheer inadvertence. Williamson's wife hadn't spoken of the picture, though he'd had quite a long talk with her. Apparently, neither of the Cravens had mentioned Beatrice to her.

2

"No telegrams to-day?" For more than a week it had been Joe's first question of the butler as the man opened the door for him upon his daily return from the office, despite a standing order that any wire that came to the apartment during the day should be telephoned on to wherever he was.

To-night, Anson said, as always, "No telegram, sir," but the inflection of the phrase was different, and Joe demanded sharply, "Well, what?"

"The young lady herself has arrived. Miss Greer, sir."

"Arrived? In town? Where is she now?"

"In the library, I believe, sir."

Joe found that he was trembling. The man had taken his hat. There was no reason why he shouldn't go straight into the library, but he hesitated. "When did she come?" he asked.

"Just after noon, sir. Around two o'clock, I think."

"Two o'clock!" Joe echoed. "Why the devil wasn't I told of it?"

"Miss Greer wished me not to disturb you, sir. She said she wished a little time to get settled." He paused, but Joe was speechless, so, after a moment, he went on. "I assisted in unpacking her trunk. She had it sent down to the store-room about an hour ago." He added, a little anxiously: "She took the blue room. I trust it's all right, sir."

"Of course it's all right," Joe answered curtly. "She's my daughter, you understand? Going to live here with me, for the present anyhow. That's all," he concluded. "You may go." He waited where he was until the man had gone through the service door. Then, after a steady-ing moment, alone, he made his way to the library.

She must have heard him talking to Anson, but she gave no overt sign of being aware of his approach. She sat facing him, one of the evening papers open in both hands so that it hid her like a curtain. It occurred to Joe that one didn't hold a paper quite so rigidly as that when one was reading it.

"Is that you, Beatrice?" he asked. He had halted without coming very close to her.

At his voice, she flung the paper aside and sprang to her feet. "Hello, dad!" she cried. She almost managed the air of one greeting a familiar at the end of a day's separation. Her voice, like Joe's, had a startling resonance and a wide inflexional swing. She added, "I suppose that *is* you." She had tried, as before, to say it casually, pertly even, but the wire edge in her voice betrayed that she was frightened.

He had expected that. What surprised him was that he was frightened, too. Almost for the first time in his life, he felt he had to lock his teeth to prevent them from chattering. He turned his look abruptly away from her but still, as he gazed blankly out the window, he could see the picture of her. She'd rouged her cheeks a little and a sudden pallor had left the two spots, staring.—She was his. His daughter! She'd come, incredibly, to live with him. She'd unpacked her trunk and sent it down to the store-room. She'd dressed as a woman dresses when she is securely at home, in the sort of thing they called, he thought, a tea-gown. And white silk stockings, and black satin slippers, high-heeled with straps. He'd find her like that, every day—unless he frightened her off.

"Yes," he said, "we're here together, at last." Then, in order not to stop talking, he went on: "You gave me a

great scare. It's two weeks since that lawyer telegraphed you'd left."

"You got my picture, though," she reminded him. "I wrote on it I was coming. I had to go to San Francisco first to get some clothes. Mother never would let me have a thing I was fit to be seen in. I thought I'd better make a good impression, so you wouldn't send me back on the next train." She gave a nervous laugh. "Have I? Do you like me?"

Somehow he couldn't look round at her, but he nodded and said, "Yes.—I must wire your mother you've come. She's been in a terrible state about you."

She had begun coming toward him, but now she stopped. "I guess you're still mad at me," she remarked, "for having kept you waiting."

At this he turned to her. "I kept *you* waiting longer than that," he said. "So what forgiving there is, you'll have to do."

"Well, then," she answered. "let's kiss and make up. I suppose that's the next thing to do." She uttered that same nervous laugh again as she came to meet him, and, when he took her in his hands, he saw that she winced. Her head went back like a frightened animal's.

Instantly he let her go, and stepped back. "We'll let that stand over while you're getting used to me," he told her.

Blood surged up into her face, and it was with a shrug she turned away. "Suit yourself about that," she said.

The paralysis which had been upon him lifted. His thought spoke itself, naturally, in words. "My dear, the only woman who ever kissed me without wanting to was your mother. I'm not going to have that handed on to you. You're going to like me some day, and when you do you'll come and kiss me without having to stiffen your back."

At that, she smiled round a little more spontaneously upon him. "I'm going to like it here, all right," she said.

And with this encouragement, partial as it was (for it was *it*, he noted, that she'd prophesied she'd like, rather than him), he took matters into his own hands. Had she said anything to Anson about dinner,—about anything she'd specially like? Was she tired after her long journey? If not, what would she say to their dining down-town,—at the Blackstone, perhaps? And seeing a show afterward, by way of making it a party?

Fine! That's what they'd do, then. She could dress or not, just as she liked. Evening dress, he meant. If she didn't, any sort of street frock would do. All right, then, he'd put on a dinner jacket himself, and they'd do the thing right. He was afraid, though, if she was going to need any help they'd have to call in the cook.

He had rung for the butler while he talked, and now, as the man appeared, he said, "We're dining down-town, Anson. Ask your wife if she'll come in a few minutes and help Miss Greer with her hooks. You'd better pick up a maid to-morrow. We'll be needing one, now. Tell Burns to be around with the closed car at ten minutes to seven. And get me the theater agency on the phone. I'll talk to them myself; want to see what they've got."

The girl, as he meant her to, had stood drinking this in with wide incredulous eyes,—the eyes of a Cinderella, entranced.

Well, that wasn't the beginning of it. He'd make it up to her for all those nineteen meager years. Just let her wait and see.

She drew herself up as he finished his instructions, and ventured, on her own account, a tentatively regal little nod of dismissal as the butler turned to go. She flushed, seeing Joe had caught her at it, and herself moved away to the door. "I'll hurry," she said.

"You needn't," he called jovially after her. "The party can't begin without you."

To the extent that he was capable of cool reflection, he decided, when the evening was over, that it had gone well,—as well as he could have hoped. Its minor failures were

all attributable to him. He shouldn't have suggested evening dress to her, in the first place. She had dressed up, thinking to please him, most likely, in a costume that must have been the climax of that fevered week's shopping in San Francisco. The gown was of a sort Joe knew well by experience, and the association made him wince; the sort a girl buys when she wants to make forty dollars look like four hundred. Extreme in cut, and with the effect of being violent in color, though it was really an off-shade of rose. She'd matched it more or less, too, in stockings and slippers, and with an unfortunate hat which he hadn't dared suggest she leave behind. He had dined and supped at restaurants uncounted times with girls who were dressed with that same general tone and had enjoyed the effect himself as well as the echo it produced from all and sundry who chanced to sit within its range. The sting of this ineluctable comparison got through his skin. He'd had to maintain an appearance of calm in the face of two or three furious gusts of anger which had swept over him when he'd seen people smile. But he didn't think she'd been aware of any of that. She'd flushed with pleasure over his enthusiastic praise of the costume, and there'd been nothing about her manner since to indicate disillusionment.

The cocktails, too, had been a mistake. A pure inadvertence they were. The captain had come over, as he always did, to take his order for drinks, and Joe had commanded Martinis before he thought. Then he came to and declined wine. He didn't suppose she'd ever tasted anything with alcohol in it. He surmised a problem here: on the broad question of intoxicants, what line ought he take with the girl? She'd be better off without them, of course. He wasn't going to begin by being a crab, though,—not to-night. The most he ventured, when the glass was put before her, was a suggestion that a sip or two wouldn't hurt her and that he'd drink up whatever she left. She'd made an impudent face at him, at which he laughed, and then, with a good deal of elaboration of

manner, proceeded slowly to drink the whole thing. He wondered uneasily whether her week in San Francisco had contributed this item to her education; he'd get a more detailed account of that sojourn from her, when he could without seeming to pry. Then he grinned as it struck him as probable that her school had been the movies.

The drink did go to her head, as the bright glow upon her temples betrayed; but the effect of this was to alarm her a little and to put her rather rigidly on guard. He was inclined to think, looking over the evening in retrospect, that this might have been the obstacle between them that he'd been faintly aware of from then on.

Or perhaps it had been the play, which wasn't, most likely, the happiest possible choice. He'd picked it partly because it was in the theater next door to the hotel; partly because he liked the charming young star who was playing in it (she was a great friend of James Wallace). But partly too, because it was a nice wholesome little piece with no possible harm in it; the sort of thing an unsophisticated young girl could appropriately be taken to. And this quality of it was what she'd resented a little, scenting something patronizing in his attitude. Naturally, anyhow, her mood hadn't been receptive, to-night, to simplicity in dotted Swiss.

Riding home after the play (for he hadn't suggested any further protraction of the party), she'd been almost silent and a little aloof,—half frightened, perhaps, over the adventure she'd embarked on. But he'd gained enormously by forbearing to press her for more than she was ready to give. He'd made no mistake here. She'd been braced, he guessed, upon their return to the flat, for some demand of confidences,—a sentimental summary of their first evening together, a looking forward to what their life was going to mean—and his apparently casual dismissal of her to bed had evidently touched as well as surprised her. She'd hesitated in the doorway, as if half minded to come back into his arms. If he'd invited her by a gesture, he thought she would have come. Well, it

was better not; let her take her time. "Telephone me at the office in the morning when you wake up," he'd called after her.

It was hours after she'd gone to bed before he even tried to sleep. His imagination was all ablaze with great projects, cunning plans, and the center from which they all radiated was that young thing, asleep by now, in there behind that unlocked door. She was his! It had been his act that created her. Now, for the first time in twenty years, that incredible bond between them had been acknowledged by her own free act and will. She had come to him, adventuring greatly, because he was her father. Well, her trust should be rewarded a hundred-, a thousand-fold! There was nothing the stall-fed folk of the world could do for their young that was more than he would do for his. That arrogant security of theirs he would make his own, in order to pass it on to her. He would make a princess of her,—a princess in her own right.

Alternately, with these luminous, grandiose conceptions, his mind engaged itself with matters of minute detail: how she could be dressed; how taught the small, irritating tricks of speech and manner by which the stall-fed tagged themselves and identified each other. Henry's sister would come in handy here; she knew all the tricks, though without money they'd never been worth much to her. His sleep that night, when finally it came, was troubled by strange dreams. Three times during the enlarging hours, he had sprung wide awake, and, leaving his bed, had stolen down the passage to listen for a moment outside her door.

At half-past seven the next morning, as he was sitting down to breakfast, she amazed him by coming into the dining-room. She was clad in a loose-sleeved bathrobe, over her nightgown, and her hair, in two thick black braids, hung over her shoulders. Her eyes were bright with youth, and the bloom of sleep lay upon her unpainted skin. Her greeting was a mere playful caress of one hand upon his shoulder. Then she sat down in the armchair opposite his, and made a great play of the domesticities of

breakfast; had the coffee urn and all the serving dishes removed to her side of the table.

She chaffed him brightly while she served and, in the intervals, made a hearty breakfast of her own. She made light of his concern that she should be up and about so early. She wasn't one of the sort who had to sleep away their days. There was nearly always something better to do than sleep, she thought, and certainly her first breakfast with her father was one of them.

The meal prolonged itself far beyond his usual limit for breakfast, and the morning paper lay unregarded on the floor. At last, however, he rose and said he must be off. She rose, too,—they had the room to themselves just then,—and for a moment she stood before him, breathless and a little flushed. Then she flung her arms around him, tight, and kissed his mouth. He gathered her up in his arms, and tears, utterly unwonted and amazing, filled his eyes.

"It was your beard I was afraid of," she murmured. "But I guess I like it."

He let her go, abruptly, for there was another damned echo in that. It was a thing that had been said to him before.

Then he dashed the unwelcome memory out of his mind. "Look here!" he cried. "How long will it take you to dress? If you'll be quick, I'll wait. Take you downtown with me to the office. I want 'em to see you. Besides, it's the place you'll have to come when you want money."

"I'll fly," she said.

3

"I'd never have left a son of mine," Joe had profanely assured Jennie MacArthur, "to be brought up by Fannings." His perfectly illogical assumption had been, all along, that a son would have been like him; a daughter must be like Annabel.

But when they had held up the new-born child for her to see, Annabel had cried out, weakly, and covered her face

with her hands; for the baby was, literally, just a little red image of her husband. The terrifying resemblance faded, as such resemblances are likely to do, within the first few hours, but not until it had been significantly remarked and commented upon by the grandparents. They sometimes spoke, piously, of the child, as a "judgment." Indeed, Beatrice could remember having heard them speak of her like that, though without knowing exactly what they meant.

It is a paradox, of course—but not inadmissibly far-fetched, perhaps,—to say that Beatrice, for all the smug suburban atmosphere which was all she'd ever had to breathe and her strictly pietistic upbringing, was much more a creature of the jungle than Joe himself. The cardinal fact in her life was fear, cutting two ways as it does with all carnivorous wild things: fear of others, and the fear she was able to inspire in others; though it wasn't always the stronger she was afraid of, nor the weaker who were afraid of her. She couldn't remember making the discovery that her mother was sometimes afraid of her. It was a fact she'd always known and, more or less, played upon.

She'd early learned a wild animal's slyness. She stalked the things she wanted, furtively, like a little half-tamed cat; everything, from cookies in the pantry, up. And when caught, in flagrant possession of her spoils, she fought for them, furiously, winning as a rule a grudging but sometimes illusory concession.

None of the Fannings, of course,—this including Anna-bel—could have entertained so impious a thought as a doubt of their whole-hearted love for the child, and that they did so love her—an assertion continually reiterated, usually in connection with disciplinary measures of some sort,—by the force of their own good faith, they made the girl believe. It gave her a rather lurid idea, though, of what love was. It was something that justified you in doing the meanest and most tyrannous things you could think of, to anybody who was the object of it. That was,

apparently, the way God loved you, too. He was always listening to things you said, spying on things you did, putting black marks against you. When He'd accumulated enough black marks against you, He sent you to hell. She worried about hell occasionally, but, in the main, she had more immediate matters to occupy her mind.

Left to herself, Annabel wasn't capable of exercising a very formidable, or even resolute, discipline, and there were periods when, for one reason or another, she was so left to herself. But under the incitement of the idea, harped upon by her own parents, that the child's escapades—truancies from school, mostly,—her wilfulness, her flashes of clear defiance, were "her father coming out in her," and that it was a matter of salvation—no less—that these manifestations be crushed, the mother could nerve herself to acts of a frantic sort of severity. There wasn't any rule or formula by which you could tell whether the lightning was going to strike.

Beatrice had never been able to explain why she so persistently played truant from school. She more or less adopted, for lack of a better, her grandfather's explanation that it was at the promptings of the devil. The simple fact was that she had inherited her father's avidity of mind and his capacity for concentration. When she was sent to the first grade of the public school, at the orthodox age of six, she was, by a year or two, precocious. She devoured a week's pabulum in a day. It was an old-fashioned grade school where they took no cognizance of a mind like that, and they drove her frantic by telling her patiently, over and over again, things she already knew; remonstrating with her when she was inattentive. So, making use of her feral technique for evading the eye of authority, she disappeared in search of more profitable employment. She burked messages they gave her to carry home, and by ten, she was a successful forger of her mother's rather formless handwriting.

When she was around twelve years old, she did find a teacher who understood what was the matter with her. □

vivid, wonderful, almost unbelievable person she seemed to Beatrice, who held her attention instead of scolding her for not giving it; who challenged her with hard tasks and shared her triumph over their accomplishment. They took walks together; they talked about things that weren't lessons; they shared, or so it seemed to Beatrice, confidences. There was the space of a few months when the Fannings doubtfully began to believe that the change of heart, the saving descent of grace which they'd prayed for so long, had come. But, abruptly, just before the end of that school year, this teacher was dismissed. Beatrice couldn't learn precisely why, though it was something that had to do with a man. She was engaged to a man who was married, or something like that. At home, her name couldn't be mentioned. Miss Morgan wrote her a note which Grandma Fanning got hold of, exhibited to her and burned in her presence without permitting her to read.

Beatrice made active war on her family for a while after that and she went no more to school that year; but against people you had to see every day and live with and were dependent on, a feud couldn't be kept up indefinitely. It subsided into what the family called sulks and were content, in the main, to ignore.

Behind the blank wall of sullen acquiescence, which she persistently turned toward them, an epoch-making event took place in the girl's life. Rummaging, one afternoon during her mother's absence, through a box in the store-room, she came upon a packet of old letters which Joe had written, at one time and another, to Annabel. (It is a perfect key to Annabel's character that she had never destroyed these letters;—had kept them all, in chronological order, hidden under a heap of discarded clothes in an old box.) The girl read through half the letters, perhaps, carried on by nothing deeper than mischief,—a sense of scoring off her mother. Then, with the dazzling suddenness of revelation, it broke over her that the writer of the letters was her own father. Her first act was to ab-

stract the whole bundle from her mother's hiding-place and transfer it to one of her own (she had plenty of them and she chose the safest). She took the most elaborate precautions against the mischance of getting caught reading them, but during hours of real security she pored over them like a scholar over a precious newly-discovered text. She brought to them all the powers of logical deduction and all the capacity for imaginative surmise which she possessed. They became, for a period of months, the central fact in her life.

Any one of the Fannings would have said confidently that Joe had never been mentioned in his daughter's presence except, in reply to an occasional direct question about him, to the effect that she mustn't ask. It was wicked to lie, so of course, they'd never told her her father was dead. There had been, as a matter of fact, a good many references to him, either in language they thought she wouldn't understand or at times when they hadn't supposed she was listening,—and her inbred slyness had induced them to go on thinking so. But it wasn't till now that she'd ever taken the enigma of him seriously, or set about solving it. Under the powerful stimulus of the letters, the dragnet of her memory brought up a number of facts which she pieced in with those the letters contained.

Her father had been, according to Fanning standards, a wicked man. But then, weren't most of the nice people in the world wicked? She'd been led to think so. He'd done something, she supposed, just as Miss Morgan had, that had condemned him to be sent away and consigned to oblivion. He must have gone very soon after she was born; for she couldn't remember him at all. Perhaps making her mother have a baby had been his crime. Maybe she, Beatrice, was a child of sin. It was a phrase she'd heard, occasionally, but had never been able to get interpreted. But why hadn't he taken her with him when he went away? She thought one who was wicked, one's self, might have treated her own derelictions more tolerantly.

She built him up into an imaginary ally; a romantic stranger, disguised, sometimes, in rags, sometimes in overwhelming panoply, coming dramatically to her rescue in hours of need.

Romance, indeed, was in the very fabric of the letters from South America, in the foreign feel of the paper and the queer look of the stamps and post-marks, in his bold black handwriting. Of explicit facts about the life he led, there were not many; occasional nuggets, merely, but these had the malleability of fine gold, and hammered out thin by much thinking, they gilded vast areas; construction camps, Indians, hours in the saddle, mountain and desert, revolutionary armies, vast waterfalls and canyons, mutinies and feuds. There were darker references, too, to earlier experiences, which, it appeared, her mother had already known something about, to jungles and cannibals and poisoned darts.

There was a quiescent period of months—a breathing spell for the Fannings—when she was content to day-dream about him. Then an access of energy took her and she bought a pony.

The next thing to godliness, in Grandpa Fanning's mind, was thrift, and in this, back in the era of Miss Morgan's influence, she had taken a sudden interest. She had consented to the impounding of the major part of her small allowance in a savings-account. She had undertaken—and more or less fulfilled—sundry tasks at a wage agreed upon. Grandpa, now and then when her zeal showed signs of flagging, had fortified it by a donation, once—in a soft moment—to the princely tune of twenty-five dollars. The sheer enormity of the crime of embezzling this fund, by the simple process of drawing it out of the bank, had prevented any of them—even, for a good while, Beatrice herself—from thinking of it.

But a neighbor boy she knew—he was in her class in high school—discovered a passionate need, irately denied by his father, for a wireless outfit. His one possession, doubtfully negotiable, was a Welsh pony. At random, one

day, on the back seat in French class, he spoke to Beatrice about it. She scribbled in her exercise book, "I'll pay you fifty dollars for him," and, within a day, the transaction was completed. There was need on both sides that it remain confidential. The pony continued to be housed and fed at the expense of the boy's unsuspecting father, but he belonged, forelock to shoes, saddle, bridle and quirt, to Beatrice. She had no clothes she could ride in, so the boy threw in a flannel shirt and a pair of knicker-bockers, discarded since he had gone into trousers.

She played truant now not merely to escape the boredom of school but to carry out delightful and moderately adventurous projects. They lived in the outskirts of town whence it was easy for the girl to ride into the open country, and it was months before her new activities were found out at home. She was caught at a time when, luckily, her grandparents were away on a trip to Seattle, and Beatrice had only her mother to reckon with. Fighting furiously to keep her loved possession, she found she had a weapon, a threat which turned her mother white.

"If you take my pony away from me," she said, "I'll run away. I'll go to my father."

She was clever enough not to elaborate the threat, aware that an attempt to do so might betray her inability to carry it out. She answered none of the frantic questions that were flung at her; entrenched herself in silence and waited. And she won a victory. Her mother conceded the pony, exacting certain lightly given promises in return: that Beatrice would be a good obedient girl and go regularly to school. The threat wasn't again referred to; Beatrice guessed it never was mentioned to her grandparents. When they returned, the pony was an openly vested possession with which they did not attempt to interfere.

This victory had one important result. It brought about her acquaintance with Carmichael Blair. She came upon him one morning,—this was in June, 1915, just at the beginning of her school vacation,—out beyond the San

Gabriel Mission, painting swiftly upon a number-forty canvas, a picture that was nearly all sky. He said hello to her in an amiably absent-minded way as she rode up and, without interruption, sped on with his work. She looked on from the saddle for a moment or two; then, as his preoccupation seemed to make her welcome rather than otherwise, dismounted, threw her reins over the pony's head, and came up behind his shoulder where she could follow the brush from palette to canvas.

She'd never thought of the sky as anything but solid blue, or the process of painting one as anything beyond getting the right tint of blue paint spread smoothly over the canvas. This surprising person was putting the most incredible colors into it.

"You're too close to it," he said, interpreting a protesting gasp she gave. "Come back here."

She followed him back four or five paces for a look, but even from this distance it wasn't entirely convincing.

"It's sort of exciting, though," she conceded.

But the really exciting thing was watching him do it. She stayed for two or three hours, absorbed, most of the time, just in the brush strokes, though her attention strayed now and then to make notes upon his person and his equipment. He was rather nice-looking, she decided, in an unromantic, matter-of-fact sort of way. He looked fairly old, but the easy-going briskness of his manner made him seem younger than any other adult person she knew. He spoke to her but seldom, and then in mere snatches, occasionally to ask her for something which she was directed to find in his car. She rather liked taking these orders, since they carried an implicit permission to stay on watching him work.

The car was amusing. It would have absorbed her but for her livelier interest in something else. It was a small touring car, or had been once, but it had been ingeniously adapted to serve his special needs. The back seat had been taken out, and the whole tonneau was filled with what looked like a wild miscellany of incongruous objects:

jugs, boxes, hampers, a blanket roll, a rack for canvasses. Both doors on one side were blocked off by a thing which she finally decided was a sort of folding-bed that hinged down and opened out.

"I can stay out for days with that," he told her. "Eat, drink, sleep and paint. My wife says it looks like the last stages of Noah's Ark. She doesn't mind, though."

The knowledge that he was married did not impress Beatrice much. Her interest in him wasn't romantic; hardly personal.

He remarked, after a while, that he guessed it must be lunch time, and directed her to the hamper where food was to be found. But when she'd opened it, he showed no intention to stop painting. "Pitch in," he commanded. "This light's changing so darn fast I don't dare quit." So she ate, with unwonted diffidence, a sandwich or two and an orange.

At last, his furious pace slackened. He paid no more attention to the altered sky; turned the canvas round so that the light fell upon it differently. He went on gazing at it abstractedly for a good many minutes, sometimes making imperceptible changes upon it with brush or fingers, and in the same preoccupied way he reached into the hamper and ate a sandwich, consuming, indifferently, along with it, an amount of paint which she hoped wouldn't prove fatal.

Suddenly he looked at her. "Well," he said simply, "I think that's a peach, myself. How do you like it?"

She went around beside him where she could see it, too; and now it broke over her that the thing was wonderful. It made her feel a little like crying. Even though, she persisted, it didn't look exactly like the thing he'd been painting. It had never occurred to her, before, that a picture could be meant for anything except to be like something else. He seemed amused, and pleased, too, when she said something of the sort.

He fitted the picture into the place in the rack from which, a blank canvas, it had been taken out a little ear-

lier; put the rest of his traps into the tonneau; sat down at the steering-wheel, and pressed the starter, evidently bent, now his business was finished, on going somewhere else,—home, most likely, wherever that was,—without loss of time. She felt pretty blank at this, and he must have seen it in her face, for he got down from the car again and came to her, holding out a hand.

"It *has* been a nice day, hasn't it?" he said. "I've enjoyed it a lot."

She stammered that she hoped she could watch him paint again some time, and his response to this was cordiality itself though completely vague.

"I hope so, too," he told her. "That'll be fine!" With no more words than that, he got back into his car and drove away, in a cloud of dust.

Beatrice getting home that night, late and ravenous for supper, told her mother at the end of the meal that she knew what she wanted to do. She wanted to be a painter.

She was startled by her mother's reception of the idea, for she'd been braced for the usual scandalized refusal. Her mother was suspicious of course; wanted to know whatever put that idea into the girl's head. And equally of course, Beatrice lied about the reason; suppressed the painter completely.

But her mother's incredulity seemed to spring from hope rather than dismay, and she began planning practical details at once. There was a woman who lived in a little bungalow the other side of town, who gave drawing lessons. When Beatrice protested that she wanted to paint, not draw, her mother laughed at her with good-humored indulgence. "You have to learn to draw first, Bee," she said. "Besides, Miss Jackson paints, too, when you get that far. Water colors; very pretty. I saw some of them the other day at Watson's store. Miniatures, too, I think. On ivory. If you really want to learn, the sooner you begin, the better."

The misgiving that she didn't want to learn anything that the casual Miss Jackson could teach her was stifled for

the time in astonishment over her mother's attitude. She acted queerly stirred about it, strangely affectionate, fluttered; she even cried a little. And at last, she gave the girl an explanation.

"It seems so queer," she said, "after all these years, to find something in you that you take after me." She added, a little sheepishly, to the girl's echoed, "After *you*?" "I wanted to be an artist once. I might have been one now, just as good as Miss Jackson, if papa hadn't stopped me."

Beatrice's misgiving, that drawing lessons with Miss Jackson weren't what she wanted at all, was confirmed up to the hilt during the first week. The lady was tall, thin and aggressively optimistic. She always prefaced criticism, even the most destructive, with little exclamations of encouragement. "Well, well, we're getting on fine!" she would say. "But don't you see, dear, . . ." Her fundamental axiom was that you had to lay the foundation, down underneath the ground, before you could go on to the more ornamental and agreeable parts of the building. And, if the foundation wasn't right, everything afterward would be wrong. Laying the foundation consisted, it seemed, in having your pencil sharpened just so, and holding it just so, when you were learning to make certain kinds of lines,—straight lines and curved lines. You draw a great many pictures of a cube in various positions, getting the angles square and the sides alike, except where there entered a mysterious thing which Miss Jackson called "purrsperspective" and talked about with an assurance which struck the girl as perhaps a little unreal. From this, you were promoted to a flower pot, below the level of the eye so that its top was seen as an ellipse.

"There's a way of drawing that right," Beatrice said, after struggling with it for a while. "You do it with a loose string fastened between two pins. I learned that in geometry."

The idea horrified Miss Jackson. This was free-hand drawing we were doing. The use of mechanical aids, such

as rulers, compasses and so forth, was immoral,—like cheating. She told Beatrice about Andrea del Sarto. He was a painter so great that he could draw, free-hand, a circle so perfect that it couldn't be distinguished, even by experts, from one produced by means of instruments.

By way of enlivening her pupil's labors, she talked enthusiastically of the successive steps: after the flower pot, a teacup and saucer, with a lump of sugar beside it; and, after this, shapes still more difficult. When you'd become proficient with lead pencil, you were promoted to charcoal, and the mysteries of shading, with a stump. The day would come when that plaster Demosthenes in the corner would be set before you, at a suitable angle, to draw. And beyond that,—well, there was no reason why we shouldn't some day begin to sketch in water color.

"But how about regular painting?" Beatrice asked.
"That's what I want to do."

"Oils? Oh, that's the last thing. That's very serious, indeed."

Beatrice stuck for a week, and it wouldn't have lasted as long as that had not her scouting trips, in search of the man who painted the sky, proved unsuccessful. She jogged about, pony-back, every afternoon, in the vicinity of San Gabriel, without finding a trace of him.

Finally, rather late one afternoon, as she was returning from another unsuccessful cast—this time along the rim of the Arroyo,—just on the edge of town, she saw, through a gateway in a wall, his car and without hesitation she rode in. The enclosure was a little yard or compound between a bungalow and a low stone building which she'd have assumed to be a garage except that it didn't look like one. It had an arched doorway filled by an ancient oak door with great hinges and bolts in it like one of the missions, and this resemblance was heightened by what looked like a shrine,—a niche with a little painted statue of a saint or something in it.

An old woman now stuck her head out of the kitchen door of the bungalow; an old wrinkled leather-faced woman

who looked at her earnestly a moment and then called back shrilly into the house in French, Beatrice thought. After an uneasy minute, for the foreign language made the girl wonder a little what she'd got into, the other bungalow door opened and another woman appeared, very jolly-looking somehow, with a fresh clean brightness about her. She paused an instant in the doorway; then, seeing her visitor was mounted, she came out toward the girl.

"Have you come to see me?" she asked.

"Why, I came," Beatrice said, "to see the man that paints. I've been looking everywhere for him for about a week, and I saw his car in here . . ."

"He'll be out in a minute," the woman said. "He's over there," she nodded toward the convent-garage, "in the studio. But I'm afraid he can't stop to see you now; he's just flying off in an awful rush in order not to miss a light he wants."

"It's all right," Beatrice said, "if he lives here. I can come again, any time."

"Wait a minute!" the woman said. She was standing now at the girl's stirrup, and without warning she called suddenly, "Mike!"

The pony took it into its head to resent this and shied violently. The convent door burst open with a creak, and the painter came out carrying a big half-painted canvas. The pony, further affronted, reared. The woman cried out. The man whipped his canvas back into the shelter of the doorway. Beatrice gave the pony the quirt and kicked him in the ribs as hard as she could, at the same time. He subsided at once, and she swung him around, for safe-keeping, into the angle of the wall. The painter, now his canvas was out of the way, was coming to her assistance.

"He's all right," she assured him.

"Why, it's you!" he cried, in a tone of pleased recognition, and was apparently coming over to shake hands with her, when he stopped short and backed away again, narrowed his eyes and stared. "By golly!" he cried.

"I've always known I wanted to do something with that corner. Do you mind staying there a minute—ten minutes—until I can get it down?" He didn't wait for her answer, but bolted back into the studio.

His wife laughed. "You're the limit, Mike," she called after him. Then she turned to the girl. "You don't mind, do you? You *are* perfectly lovely like that, with that light on you."

Beatrice replied, a little dazed, that she didn't. No one had ever told her that she looked lovely, even when she was dressed up, and in these awful old riding things it seemed incredible.

The painter came out again in a minute or two carrying a big flat wooden box; sat down on a bench against the wall of the bungalow, opened the box on his knees and began drawing, apparently on the inside of the lid.

His wife nodded to the girl, said, "There'll be tea pretty soon," and disappeared into the house.

As for the man, he didn't speak a word, and, though he kept looking up at her every minute, it was, somehow, as if he didn't see *her* at all. The glare of the low-hanging sun, reflected from the pink wall and the hard-packed red earth, was hot in her face. The pony fidgeted, and she had hard work keeping him still. The ten minutes the painter had asked for must have been long exceeded. How long, she couldn't guess. But the man painted on, oblivious.

His wife came out, at last; said to her with a commiserating smile, "I hope you're not too awfully tired," and then, looking over her husband's shoulder, forgot all about her. "That's gorgeous, Mike!" she said.

"Isn't it great," he asked, "the way that scarf reflects on the under side of her face?" For another short eternity, he worked on. At last, he laid palette and brushes on the bench beside him, held the color box out at arm's length in both hands, stared at it intently a while, and rose. "That'll do," he said. "I'll paint it up some day." Then, somehow, the look that he turned upon the girl

lighted into a smile which swept away her pent-up resentment. "I'm just awfully obliged to you," he said.

On the way into the house for tea—after they had tied up the pony in the shade—he let her stop to look at what he had been painting,—a terribly embarrassing moment since she couldn't find a word to say. The thing looked, simply, like an unbelievable daub, as if it had been painted by a child. Things like her hands and the pony's feet weren't painted at all. Her face hadn't any features, was just a mess of red and ugly ochre paint. But neither the man nor his wife seemed affronted by her silence.

And in their living-room—a funny, big, half-empty place, she forgot the picture, for a while, altogether.

She'd never met people like these. They were unmistakably grown-up but they didn't act nor talk that way. They just acted—natural; did and said, it seemed, whatever they liked. They called each other Mike and Wanda, and, when they learned her name, they called her Beatrice. The leather-faced old French woman, who was in and out of the room as she chose, bringing edibles as it occurred to her to do so and taking them away when she thought they'd had enough, didn't act like a servant, though plainly enough she was. She talked with them, in her own language, volubly; sometimes it sounded as if she was scolding them, but they didn't seem to care,—answering, now meekly, now jocularly, in French that seemed to cut the corners just as hers did. She tried to imagine her mother talking to a servant like that.

Mike arose, indolently, after a while, and, without excuse or explanation, wandered out into the yard (they both managed, she observed, to seem perfectly nice and amiable without any of the flourishes which she'd been taught were manners), and, pretty soon, she heard him come in again. She didn't turn to see what he was doing, down there at the other end of the room behind her, because Wanda went straight on talking. But presently the woman said, "Now, look round, and see what you think of yourself."

Mike had just hung a picture on the wall, and it was—it must be—the very picture he'd just painted of her. It was in a frame. She didn't see how a picture could be framed as quickly as that. Besides, it didn't seem credible that it could be the same. From away off here at the other end of the room, it looked—finished; beautiful! The pony was all there; she was all there herself, even her face, and she knew he hadn't painted a face at all. And the blaze of sunlight glorified it.

"It sings, doesn't it?" Wanda remarked. And this seemed to be literally true. It appeared that both of them enjoyed her frank astonishment over it.

"You know," she mustered courage to say to Mike, as he wandered over and stood beside her, "why I wanted to find you, was to ask you if you'd teach me to paint, too. I don't suppose I ever could."

"Well, you never can tell till you try," he answered, off the top of his mind. Then, coming into a little sharper focus, "Ever studied at all?" he asked.

She decided to annihilate Miss Jackson. "Never," she said.

"That's fine!" he exclaimed. "I'm going up the Arroyo to-morrow morning—pretty early, though. You can come along, if you like. Wear some old clothes. You're likely to get as much paint on yourself as you do on the picture."

"Paint?" she asked. "You mean oil paint? You'd let me begin that way?"

"It's the only way to teach anybody to let outlines alone," he said indifferently.

"You don't care when you get home, do you?" Wanda warned her. "If he gets going, he usually makes a day of it. I'll put you up some grub."

It occurred to Beatrice, as she rode home through the thick twilight, that they hadn't asked her a question: who she was, where she lived, anything. Nor had they volunteered any more facts than they'd asked. Beyond Mike and Wanda, she didn't even know their names. And he

hadn't said a word about how many lessons she'd need, nor breathed a hint about pay.

She told her mother, accounting for the fact that she was late for supper, that she'd got lost, up the Arroyo. That night, she filched a sheet of her mother's note paper and wrote a little letter to Miss Jackson to the effect that Beatrice was going to be away a good deal for the next few weeks and wouldn't be able to finish this term of lessons. It was all right, though, about the money, and she might come back for another term later. With the unlost skill of long experience, she signed her mother's name and slipped out to the post-box with it.

She made no perceptible progress at painting, under Carmichael Blair's instruction. With pencil she did a little better, but not much. But the Blairs between them gave her more real education, during the swift months of that summer, than she'd ever got before. She saw one or the other of them almost daily. She made uncounted excursions in the car, with Mike,—listening to his talk when he was in the mood for it; silently watching him paint when, as more often happened, he was not. She spent whole days in the studio or the bungalow, reading, when she couldn't get Wanda to tell her stories of their travels. One may say it was during that summer she learned to read, as anything beyond a compulsory academic exercise. She devoured books about the sea,—Captain Marryat and Clark Russell: *Two Years before The Mast* and *The Cruise of the Cachalot*. She read *The Three Musketeers*, and made a start on *Gil Blas* (the Blairs had it, in French, illustrated with marvelous wood cuts, which inspired her to draw an English translation of it out of the Public Library). And Rudyard Kipling burst upon her like a revelation.

It was the personal quality of Mike and Wanda that supplied the vital spark for all this. They had voyaged long weeks over distant seas; they'd lived in Paris and Rome and London; they'd been in Egypt and Siam and India—knew that those places were really there. They

gave actuality, too, to the newspaper accounts of the progress of the war. Most of those French and Belgian towns that figured in the despatches were places whose streets they had walked.

Broadly, it came to this: they rolled up the curtains of the world, her own world to some extent as well as the wider one. It was possible, somehow,—it must be possible because they managed it—to be free without being outlaws. In time, they might have tamed her out of her cat-like furtiveness, but that one summer's acquaintance wasn't long enough.

It had been founded upon a lie, and, upon an ascending progression of lies to her mother, it was maintained. She wasn't forced to lie much to the Blairs, so little were they addicted to prying into her with questions. The very sketchy account of her home life with which she furnished them satisfied what little curiosity they showed.

She'd puzzled Mike, every now and then, by an apparent revival of her interest in drawing. She'd take a pencil and a pad and start something, and it never was very hard to impose on his simplicity (she had an uneasy feeling that Wanda wasn't quite so completely taken in) to the extent of getting him to take the pencil away from her and show her how the thing ought to be done. The product, eighty per cent. his perhaps, she unobtrusively carried off and exhibited at home as evidence of her diligence and progress with Miss Jackson. The imposture wouldn't have worked even with Annabel if it had not squared with her hopes, and if the girl's real happiness had not produced, in minor domestic matters, an appearance of docility.

What brought about her exposure was the enthusiasm of a chance caller over her sketches. The unstinted praise was sweet to Annabel, who hadn't thought very highly of the drawings herself, and she wrote a "nice little note" to Miss Jackson and invited her up to tea.

Beatrice had known she'd get caught some time, but she hadn't at all foreseen how painful the experience was going

to be, nor how drastic the result of it. She'd be forbidden ever to see the Blairs again and, no doubt, the prohibition would interfere, for a while, with their companionship. But she counted on them, confidently, as resourceful allies.

It was to this expectation she anchored, securely she thought, through the worst domestic tempest she'd ever experienced. They kept her prisoner for two days, by the expedient of abstracting her clothes while she slept and locking them up; and during this time her grandfather sold her pony. She won her release from Annabel under the threat of escaping into the street in her nightgown, a thing which she was resolutely determined to do. She went straight to the Blairs' bungalow, and here she found bitter disappointment.

Blair must have seen her coming for he met her in the yard. "You can't come here any more, you know," he said. The fact that his tone was, superficially, as pleasant as ever made it all the more unendurable. "Your grandfather came to see us last night. Told us all about it. He made us feel, Wanda and me, like about fifteen cents apiece. You see, *we* aren't sneaks, though that's naturally what he thought we'd been—about you. And we can't be friends with people who tell us lies and who tell lies about us."

She stood staring at him, speechless, aghast. She knew she was going to cry, for the first time almost since she could remember.

"I'm sorry," he concluded at the end of a pause she couldn't even try to make use of, "but that's all." He turned and went into the studio, and Beatrice went home, sobbing, heedless of the stares and the sometimes attempted questions of the people she met along the way.

Her only protection against the acid of Blair's comment was a furious anger against the pair, and this she fanned into flame whenever they came into her thoughts. Meeting Wanda on the street, a week or two later, she passed her without a nod or a glance. But the woman turned and walked a little way beside her.

"I'm horribly sorry about it all," she said. "And Mike is, too. I think he took it a little too hard, but he can't help that. Anything that isn't just the plain truth is poison to him."

The girl gave no indication that she'd heard.

"In one way," Wanda went on, after they'd walked a few paces in silence, "it doesn't matter so much. Because we're going away in a week or two, anyhow. We're going back east and find some way of getting into the war." Then, "Good-by, Beatrice."

"Good-by," Beatrice said hoarsely. But she didn't pause nor glance around, and Wanda, with a little shrugging gesture, turned back.

So the episode ended by leaving a scar of real cynicism upon the adolescent spirit; a scar not necessarily indelible, but not to be removed by the mere lapse of time. The years, nearly four, between the going away of the Blairs and Beatrice's own flight to Chicago, had no healing in them. Rather empty uneventful years they were, during which she alternated between phases of weak restless revolt against the life her authorities prescribed for her, and a sullen acquiescence in it. Sometimes in an access of energy, she would read or study furiously for a few weeks. She had a spurt or two of activity in war work, incited mostly by the fact that the war was frowned upon at home. She drifted along through high school and, after five years of desultory attendance, managed to graduate.

She made the discovery of the male sex, as such, rather late, considering her precocity, and, during the last two years that she lived with her mother, most of her talent for intrigue was devoted to escapades—innocent if one uses the word in its narrow technical sense, but not very wholesome—with schoolboys and young men. Her attitude toward them was meretricious rather than romantic. A boy who had the run of a car, and was pecunious and liberal enough to stand excursions into Los Angeles or out to the beaches, was a desirable possession, to be kept good-

humored and interested by the discreet allowance to the sentimental, semi-amorous privileges demanded. She was, in the main, quite frigid about all this, and never felt the stir of any desire urgent enough to be alarming. In a shabby, second-rate sort of way, she became rather sophisticated. Her spiritual tone was pretty well established by the movies which she assiduously frequented.

Her grandmother's death, in nineteen-eighteen, gave her, though not at once, an idea that had a hope behind it. Her grandfather, some time, and perhaps before very long, would die, too; when that happened she would have only her mother to reckon with. And Annabel had grown, with every passing year, less formidable to her. She'd be able, she believed, to make her mother do anything she liked.

She marked the appearance of a Mr. Hawthorne Whittington in their domestic circle, and even his steadily increasing importance, without very serious concern. Her mild dislike of him was spiced by a contemptuous amusement. Though it was several years since he'd retired from the lecture platform to his lemon grove, he'd kept a public manner—the sort of air that made people say after he'd passed, "Who was that?"—and a love for the center of the stage, and these harmless weaknesses provided Beatrice with moments of amusement at his expense. It was fun to reduce him to helpless, because inexpressible, wrath with a well-placed interruption, or to see how blank he looked when she caused one of his well-oiled witticisms to miss fire by taking him literally. Even after his visits had come to be almost daily affairs, she didn't surmise that his dislike, or hatred, could ever be important to her.

It was a lawyer's visit to the house, one evening, that frightened her. The falsely casual attempt to give it the air of a social call, a reference, by the man, to "the little matter" he and her mother had to talk about, Annabel's flutters and the solemnity of the withdrawal into the dining-room and the shutting of the door, all were portentous. Beatrice, left alone on the veranda with her grandfather, felt a sudden sinking of the heart. Some-

thing was happening that she must know about, at once, but she'd gain no knowledge from that old man by asking questions.

She rose and lounged across to the rail, where, without turning, he could not watch her. Then she laughed. "Isn't mother funny!" she said.

"Funny!" her grandfather growled. "She's doing it for you."

"She needn't," said the girl.

"No, I s'pose not," he sneered. "But she's going to, and it'll be a good thing for you. I'm going to die before long. And you do need somebody. Younger'n I am—and stronger. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't let her do it. Foolish risk, any time. Nonsense, at her age. But this one ain't a limb of Satan—and that's what the other one was."

"You mean my father?" Beatrice asked.

The question roused the old man from his soliloquy. He hadn't consciously been talking to her at all. He turned and eyed her suspiciously; then told her she'd better go to bed.

She went, not unwillingly, having got enough to keep her mind occupied for a while. Next morning, finding her mother alone, she asked, casually, "How long does it take to get a divorce, mother?"

Annabel's embroidery scissors flew out of her hand; her face flamed. "Who told you?" she demanded in a panic.

Beatrice surprised them all by taking the prospective revolution so quietly. It was, in fact, much too serious a matter for anything so ineffectual as threats and rages. Hawthorne Whittington as a stepfather would make life intolerable; before the marriage took place, she would run away. But she wasted no moves by serving notice of her intention. She had her picture taken and began stringing her wires for Hollywood.

Joe's letter, though it reduced her for an hour or two to a state of dazed and almost helpless excitement, drew from her no gush of affection for him, like water smitten

miraculously from the rock. It didn't even restore him as the romantic rescuer who had been, a few years back, so constantly the hero of her day-dreams. She thought of him—as soon as the recession of the first flurry made it possible for her to think at all—a little resentfully and quite cynically, as a stranger; a man like all men, a tyrant if he could get a chance to be, and a bargainer not inclined to give something for nothing. He had some motive, unavowed, in breaking this silence of twenty years and sending for her now.

She had sensed in his letter the patronizing note; the fact that she was being talked down to, as a little girl—innocent, ignorant, easy to control. And this observation gave her her line: the thing to do with a man like that was to get the jump on him, surprise him, keep him guessing. It was deliberately a part of her campaign that she demanded the whole of the thousand dollars, and, for a fortnight, disappeared with it. If he demanded explanations, she would refuse them as insolently as possible. Whatever happened, she must bluff it out; she must never let him see that she was frightened.

4

The tears she saw in her father's eyes, when she'd kissed him over their first breakfast, obliterated the fear that she'd be shipped back to Pasadena as unsatisfactory; as his forbearance, the evening before, had made it plain that she wouldn't have to run away from him. They'd "get on" all right. And the ménage she found him in, as well as the place he seemed to offer her in it, was far beyond the wildest of her hopes. The "good flat" and the two cars he had mentioned in his letter had suggested no such establishment as this. Anson—dignified, inscrutable, sophisticated, and, implicitly at least, under her orders—was as incredible as if he'd come out of the movies. And Burns, the chauffeur—her chauffeur, in effect, since her father seemed never to require his services by day,—was as good-looking and jolly and serviceable to her

caprice as any of the young princes of Hollywood who sometimes disguised themselves in jobs like that, for a lark—or a purpose.

The car she elected to do most of her driving in was not the sumptuous monster in which Joe had taken her down to dinner on that first evening, but a sport model of the same famous make. Her first edict was that she be allowed to learn to drive it. They made daily cruises, she and young Burns, of uncounted miles and unreckoned hours. She even liked the country. The color and freshness and variety of the foliage excited her, accustomed as she was to the palmetto-punctuated monotony of southern California.

Most of the time during those first few days, she felt like Ali Baba when he had first said, "Open sesame!" But, again like Ali Baba, she was to experience no comfortable security in the possession of her treasure trove. There were enigmas about her father's life she couldn't solve; alarms that kept her constantly on the alert.

She'd stumbled upon the first of these the morning Joe took her to the office. He'd introduced her round promiscuously, during the ostensible process of showing her over the place, to all sorts of people,—draughtsmen, clerks, stenographers—usually in a perfectly one-sided manner: "This is my daughter, Beatrice"; of course, it didn't matter to her who they were.

But to this procedure there had been a striking exception. On leading her up to one young woman,—a creature with some pretense to looks and a lot of red hair; probably some sort of head stenographer since she seemed to have an office of her own,—her father had said, "Beatrice, this is Jennie MacArthur." He'd said it, too, on a different note, significantly somehow, and the significance seemed to be that here was somebody who, for an unguessed reason, did matter. He added, as if to put it beyond doubt, "I want you two to get acquainted."

Beatrice, startled and feeling herself flushed, managed a rather cavalier nod and an abbreviated "How do you

do"; and then, though she hadn't meant to, extended her hand.

The woman didn't act snubbed at all, though the intention, Beatrice thought, had been plain enough. Her look was penetrating and deliberate. "We're very glad you've come," she said. Then, turning to him—her employer, "Congratulations!" She didn't merely *say* it, either; she put something into it, some special meaning.

There'd been conversation—disjointed, rather at random—after this; questions about the sort of trip she'd had across the continent; a brief account of what they'd done the night before.

At last she said, amazingly: "There's nothing much here this morning, Joe. Why don't you take the day off?"

Though he vetoed the suggestion briskly,—there was something he particularly wanted to get at—he didn't seem to feel that there'd been anything officious about it. And the "Joe" neither of them seemed to have been conscious of, at all. Evidently it was what she called him.

Who was she? What was she? What was her—hold on him, and how had she managed to get it?

She thought her father acted, now, as if he'd still like to stay longer, but was conscious of being turned out. He said, "Well, we won't bother you any more, *now*, but . . ."

Jennie MacArthur nodded an easy farewell to the girl. "Oh, we'll get acquainted all right in time," she said.

Beatrice was too wary to ask her father any questions, and to his, that night at dinner—what did she think of Jennie MacArthur; how had she liked her?—her replies had been colorless enough, she thought, to give him no hint of her surmise.

Casually, in the course of a driving lesson, she put a question or two to Burns. Who was the good-looking woman in the office, with red hair?

Miss MacArthur! Oh, yes, he knew her. Very pleasant she was, and smart, too, he guessed. He understood

she was secretary of the company. She lived up in Edgewater. He'd driven her home once or twice when her own car had been out of commission.

She had a car, then, Beatrice commented.

He qualified this. It was a flivver coupé.

"Home from where?" Beatrice asked. "Does she ever come to our house?"

"I couldn't say as to that," he answered, and it struck her that his manner was a little artificially discreet. Not even the thrill of learning to run the big car could drive the problem out of her mind.

But it was pretty well supplanted, a few days later, by another, more serious. Her father, as they were leaving the breakfast table, said to Anson: "Mr. Craven and his sister are dining with us to-night. No one else."

She perceived, from the moment of real attention he gave the butler's question as to what wine they should have, that the dinner wasn't quite the casual thing his offhand announcement of it was meant to make it appear. (Wine hadn't been an item at their dinners, nor even, since that first night at the Blackstone, cocktails. Her father helped himself to whisky out of a carafe, but never offered any to her.) She asked, when he was on the point of going off without telling her, who the Cravens were.

"Why, you met Henry, that day at the office," he said. "He's treasurer of the company."

"Was he the smallish man with eye-glasses?" she asked. And, at his nod, "Is he a particular friend of yours?"

There was something she took as not quite serious about his answer. "Sure he is. Henry and I have cottoned up in great style." He hesitated, then went on, more soberly: "His sister Margaret's a mighty fine woman. You want to make a good impression on her." At the door, he turned back to say: "Better wear your little blue dress, I guess. More the thing for a small family dinner than the red one."

She was in two minds, during the day, whether she wouldn't defy him here, by way of establishing a principle

she was in danger of allowing to lapse. But a misgiving, picked up she knew not where, about that rose-colored costume, which had looked so desirably smart in the Market Street shop, led her to follow her father's suggestion. For a few minutes after their guests arrived, she was glad she had done so. She sniffed danger in the wind, and until it had passed she didn't want her hands tied by a quarrel, no matter how trivial, with her father.

She couldn't have said just what it was that made her uneasy, but her pitiless young eyes saw, beneath Margaret's surface suavity, something haggard. It betrayed itself in the corners of her eyelids and in the tightness of her throat muscles. It could be heard, sometimes, in the wire edge of a word—addressed, usually, to her brother, or when, with what was meant to sound like pure good humor, she told stories at his expense. She was old and tired and, for some reason only to be guessed, not far from desperate.

But, all the more for that, she was formidable. Over the cocktails in the drawing-room she had addressed her host as Joe, but without—quite—Jennie MacArthur's unconsciousness. A gleam in his eye told the girl that he had noted it, too, with interest and perhaps with pleasure. So it must have been the first time. The woman hadn't done it idly; nothing she did was idle.

Beatrice contented herself with a single sip at her glass; then carried it over to her father. "I ought to have done this, last time," she admitted confidentially, and he squeezed her arm in approval. But when Margaret took a cigarette, she helped herself to one also. She'd had a fortnight of assiduous practise and decided she could safely venture. He laughed at this bit of bravado, but didn't seem displeased. She felt it was a good beginning; her father's darling and the complete hostess were the two fronts she wished to present,—a double warning to trespassers.

And as the evening advanced, she gained confidence that she was succeeding with both. She sat very straight, in

the high-backed armchair which faced her father's, and felt herself satisfactorily in the part (the movies have their uses, after all. She'd learned a lot from Pauline Frederick and Elsie Ferguson). Anson fortified her somehow; it was the first time she'd felt him clearly as an ally. But the great thing was her father's look. Something came into it, whenever he turned it upon her, that quickened her heartbeat. As long as he went on looking at her like that she was in no danger from anybody.

Their hour in the drawing-room after dinner was really rather jolly, and one of her few conversational ventures, made in the course of it, proved a distinct success. Miss Craven had been admiring the big Sorolla, when Beatrice asked, "Did you ever hear of a painter named Carmichael Blair?"

They'd all heard of him, it seemed. He'd had a show, only a few months earlier, at the Institute. But why had she asked?

"Some of his pictures are a little like that, I think," she said. "They—sort of sing, just like that does."

In that moment she decided that, without reserve, she liked Henry Craven, just for the way his face lighted up over this remark. "You're perfectly right," he told her; "there's a real resemblance, in just that quality." He added, "Blair lived out in California for a while, didn't he?"

She nodded. "He tried to teach me to paint, once. But I wasn't much good at it." She had the satisfaction of feeling that she'd said that exactly right.

So the evening summed up to a real success. Her comments on their guests, after they'd gone, were enthusiastic; genuine, as they concerned Henry, and so nearly in the same tone as they concerned Margaret that she didn't believe her father could tell the difference.

But the little lunch Margaret had for her, a week later, didn't go off so well, and she came home from it depressed, vaguely resentful, and with her first misgiving of the woman's design upon her father wide awake again.

Margaret's flat had been a shock to her. She'd assumed that these people were rich,—in the circle of big bankers her father had spoken of in his letter. But they couldn't be; they were poor; the flat was small, the furniture old-fashioned, and the only servant in evidence might have been one in her mother's endless succession out in Pasadena. She wondered, uneasily, if her father had been taken in.

The shabbiness of the setting in which she was revealed didn't lessen at all her hostess's assurance; heightened it, if anything. She seemed cooler and harder, as well as—somehow—more mechanical, than on the night she and her brother had come to dinner. Beatrice was the first of the guests to arrive and during those few minutes while they were alone she had the uncomfortable sense of being under examination; on trial—to have it decided whether she would do! The questions themselves were friendly enough. How did she amuse herself during the long hours her father spent at the office? (Margaret knew how long they were, because of her brother.) Had she any trouble finding her way about? Had she been shopping? Margaret would go with her if she liked, almost any day, and show her where—well, the right sort of things, were to be found. One could waste a lot of time—as well as a lot of money—in a strange city, making all those discoveries for one's self. No, there was no harm in the questions;—only the girl's answers seemed, always, somehow, to give her away.

The arrival of the other guests didn't improve matters, either. There were only two of them (it wasn't a party, Margaret explained), young girls of about her own age. After the buzzer had announced them in the vestibule, her hostess told her, swiftly, who they were. One was Dorothy Williamson, whose father had gone in with hers in the new flax business. She had got back, only the week before, from her school, Thornycroft, in the East. The other was her particular friend, Sylvia Stannard. Sylvia's people had a place at Lake Geneva, but her brother

had lately bought a farm, out on the Elgin road, in which she was taking a passionate interest, and her conversation, unless she was summarily dealt with, was likely to be heavily agricultural. "If she talks about Duroc-Jerseys"—Margaret finished the sentence though the two girls were now coming into the room—"don't think she means cows. She caught me that way, the other day."

From the first moment, in the mere acknowledgment of the introduction, they disconcerted Beatrice, though she couldn't be sure they meant to. At least, they didn't sneer nor toss their heads nor turn their shoulders upon her, the way the thing was done in the movies. But she couldn't get in step with them. Their easy, rather jolly talk gave her no handles to hold on by. Miss Craven, every now and then, threw her what was plainly meant for a life-line, but when she tried to take these leads and ventured out of her shell of silence, it was into a vacuum. They were both younger than she, she decided, and neither was as much dressed-up. She was confident that she knew more about a lot of things than they did. When a telephone call took their hostess out of the room, for quite a long while, the vacuum got higher than ever. They didn't talk about men at all, even with this opportunity, and Beatrice's attempt to introduce the topic was, as her instinct had warned her it would be, a failure.

"I think Henry Craven's a peach!" Beatrice had volunteered, apropos of something that had been said about Margaret. "I had a lot of fun with him at dinner the other night." Then, uneasily aware that both the other girls were looking a bit blank, she added, "You know him, don't you?"

"Rather!" the Williamson girl answered. "He's my cousin. Yes, he's a lamb."

Beatrice flushed and looked away; it was as if a door had been shut in her face.

Later, after Margaret had come back, the talk veered to plans for the summer. Margaret and Portia Novelli were taking the Aldrichs' cottage on Cape Cod (Portia's hus-

band was going to be busy all summer at Ravinia). Margaret said in a casual but friendly way to Beatrice, "You ought to come down and see us. Get acquainted with the Atlantic Ocean as well as the Pacific. It isn't so big, but it's rather nice."

Sylvia meant to spend most of the summer—all of it, unless her mother got too unpleasant about it—with the boys on the farm.

Dorothy yawned. "I've a hunch that we're going to have a little barytone in our home this summer. We met him last week, in New York. He's signed up for the Ravinia season. He doesn't speak any English, and Violet's French is rather funny round the edges, so I suppose I'll be kept standing by most of the time, to see that they don't get tangled up."

"Is Violet your sister?" Beatrice asked.

"Mother," said Dorothy, and Sylvia giggled.

"Really, Dorothy, that's outrageous," Margaret remonstrated.

"Well, she's the one that makes me do it," was Dorothy's retort.

There broke over Beatrice a wave of something like homesickness. Home had never been a place she'd consciously loved. She'd never found much sympathy or security in it; nor anything better than meager and unsatisfying spiritual fare in the world that surrounded it. But its inhabitants and their codes and standards were, after all, familiar and intelligible to her. These people were aliens. They left her out, not so much from malice as from the lack of any connective medium. She glanced round, desperately, at the clock; it would be almost an hour before Burns would call for her with the car. Luckily, the other guests went earlier, and she experienced a certain relief at being left alone with Miss Craven.

Just as she was leaving, the invitation for a visit to the Cape Cod cottage was repeated, this time in a way to show that it was meant and must be, in some fashion, dealt with.

"Why, it's frightfully kind of you," Beatrice said. "I don't think father means me to go away again as soon as this.—I've just come, you see. But I'll speak to him about it."

"Do!" said Margaret. "If he's going to be away himself any time this summer, up in the Northwest where they're building their flax factories, it might just fit in."

5

Beatrice awaited his return from the office that evening with an emotion that was more filial and domestic than anything she had felt toward him before. She had never, from the first moment, been indifferent to him. Her scheme for keeping the whip hand of him by an alteration of cajolery and defiance had fallen to pieces when he rejected her first proffered kiss and told her why. He'd frightened her since then, he'd quickened her heartbeat, he'd made himself, once more, the center of her thoughts and dreams; he'd given her, in some ecstatic moments, a vertiginous sense of conquest. But until she came home, depressed and forlorn, from Margaret Craven's lunch, she had never waited for him as an inseparable ally, a bringer of security and confidence.

She'd hoped he would be early—something he'd said that morning had led her to think he might be,—but his regular time passed and the better part of an hour after that before she heard Anson letting him in, and by then she was on the verge of tears. Unluckily, too, he came to her full of something—some idea or plan or triumph—of his own. He was very jovial about it, whatever it was, and the hug and the kiss he gave her, though vigorous and enthusiastic, lacked the tenderness she, for the first time, wanted. She released herself with a movement of petulance which caught his attention.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "Getting lonesome?"

The tone of the question, good-natured as it was, didn't invite confidences. She felt no real concern in it. So

she scolded him for being late; erected his casual prediction of that morning into a promise, that he'd be home early.

"I'm sorry about that, Trix," he said. (This was the nickname she'd elected.) "I started out all right, but I got caught by something unexpected. Damn unexpected!" he added, mostly to himself.

But she heard it, and with a resentful glance made sure that the unexpected thing had still the principal place in his thoughts. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction of asking him what it was.

"I'll make it up to you now, though," he went on. "What can you think of that it would be fun to do? I guess we've seen most of the shows, but if you want to repeat on any of them, I'm game. And there's still time to go down-town to dinner. We won't stop to dress; you look great, just as you are."

"You hate that red dress of mine,—I know you do," she said. "I guess you're ashamed of me in it." Her voice broke over that and betrayed the fact that she was crying.

There was a long moment before he made any response at all. She had a sense of him, for she didn't turn to look, standing unnaturally still and not looking at her. Then, without warning, for he moved lightly and the rugs were soft, she felt his hands upon her. Of her weak resistance and her broken, "No, let me alone," he took no account at all, but picked her up bodily, carried her to his special big chair and sat down in it with her in his lap.

"Put your head down," he said, in his vibrant voice, "and cry as long as you like. And then, when you're ready, tell me all about it."

She didn't want to cry any more—indeed, surprise at being taken up like that had checked her tears,—but neither did she want to talk. She had, for just that moment, no sense of grievance, against him or against the world. Everything else was swallowed up in the sensation of his comprehensive embrace; nothing even remotely

like that had, in the whole length of her memory, happened to her before.

This didn't last long. Her consciousness, so deeply submerged in this new element, came floating to the surface again. She was aware of the prickle of his beard upon her wet face; she wondered if he was smiling.

"I expect it's just lonesomeness that made you feel that way," he said, and she noted, even then, something forced in his tone of reassurance, as if he were managing a small child. "You've been sitting around by yourself all day, with nothing to do and nobody to talk to. We'll have to tackle that problem, somehow."

She told him, without raising her head, that this was a bad guess. It hadn't been an unoccupied day, at all. She'd gone to a party.

"Margaret Craven's lunch," he said. "I know." (She was sure, though, that he'd forgotten all about it.) "But I guess you can feel lonesomer at a party than anywhere else, if things don't go just right. What went wrong this time?"

"Oh, nothing much," she said, over a catch that had come back into her breathing. She wished he wouldn't ask her questions; just go on, holding her still. Again she felt, from the movement of his beard, that he was smiling.

"Did you wear the wrong sort of hat?" he asked.

"I guess so," she agreed dully. "She as good as told me so."

"Oh, damn!" she heard Joe murmur. Then, with an edge in his voice, "You don't mean she was really—impolite to you, unfriendly?"

"Oh, no; she was all right," Beatrice told him. "She offered to take me shopping with her. Show me where I could get 'the right sort of things,' as if she could see plain enough mine weren't. I suppose that's what you think, too.—I wish you would go shopping with me."

"What makes you think I know anything about women's clothes?" he demanded, but in a tone she recognized as not

serious. It had a joke in it for his private enjoyment. Of course, he'd probably bought clothes for all sorts of women, but that wasn't the sort of thing he'd expect her to guess.

"You want to take up that offer of hers," he said, after a silence. "She's a mighty well-dressed woman herself, and she hasn't had much to do it on, I guess. I'm sure she meant it in a friendly way. And she could give you the right dope about lots of things."

"I don't care whether it's the right dope or not," she persisted. "I don't want her telling me what to wear. I want you to." She slipped her free arm round his massive shoulder. "Will you go shopping with me, dad?" she said. "You'll know what you like anyhow, and that's all I care about."

He hugged her up tighter at that. "All right," he said, "it's a bargain. We'll go some day, the first chance we get." There was silence for a while after that, but he hadn't, as she hoped, done with the luncheon. "Did she have anything else to say?" he asked, and the girl perversely asked, "Who?"

"Why, Margaret Craven."

She thought he'd hesitated a little over the use of the name. "Oh, nothing much," she told him.

He waited for more; then he asked who else was at the party.

It wasn't a real party, she said. There were only two other girls besides herself. One of them was named Stannard—Sylvia Stannard; she pretended to be crazy about farming. And the other was Dorothy Williamson.

"What's she like?" The question was asked on so different a note, with such an appearance of personal concern, that Beatrice sat erect and looked at him. "Why," he explained, "she's Williamson's daughter, that's gone into business with me. He's got a picture of her, a chalk, on the wall of his office. Very pretty girl I'd have said from that. Anyhow, I'd like you to make friends with her."

"Well, I'm not likely to," she said. "She's a little up-

stage snip, that's what she is. And she isn't pretty,—that is, not very. I got enough of her to-day to last me a long time." She rose from his knees at that, and walked away, noting that he had made no effort to detain her.

"Look here, Trix," he said, at last, "we want to get things straight. Don't want to make any mistakes right at the start. I think it's a safe bet that that girl will treat you all right when she knows who you are:—after her mother has had a talk with her, anyhow. And she probably is all right, though she may be a little high and mighty. They're all that, one way and another. But, with them, the point is, it isn't a bluff. They really are like that, not putting it on. They know they're solid, and they don't—give a damn, for anybody."

"Take those Williamsons. I didn't understand 'em till I saw where they lived. They've got one of the most beautiful places I ever saw, up at Lake Forest. Acres and acres of it,—I don't know how big it is. And a house as big as a hotel. But it might be a five-room cottage for anything they care. They have things as they like; do and dress as they please. There's no one to tell 'em what they shall do or what they shan't."

"Well, we're going to be like that ourselves. We are now only they haven't found it out, altogether. Some day, we'll have a place like Williamson's. I'm not as rich as he is now, but I'm on the way to be. I expect there're some of them we'll find pretty dull and stuffy, but there're others that aren't. I've found that out already. On the whole, once they see we're inside the fencee, they're a perfectly friendly lot. And as good a lot to settle down among as you'll find anywhere. Well, and that's what we're going to do, when I've polished off this flax business."

The girl stirred, impatiently. She was standing at the window, looking out over the lake where a bank of heavy clouds was coming up with a summer shower.

Her father rose and came toward her. "How does that strike you?" he asked.

"I suppose it's all right to settle down some time," she

said. "Only that isn't what I'd hoped I'd do with you. I thought maybe we'd go off somewhere together, exploring like you used to. Down in South America. I found some letters once, that you wrote mother. Long ago, that was, when I was a little girl, but I've never forgotten the things you told about. She'd have hated it all, of course, but I'd love it. Riding over mountain passes, and crossing canyons on rope bridges. Finding out things; seeing things nobody else had seen. I wouldn't be afraid anywhere, with you."

He was silent at that, and, from a glance she stole at his face, thoughtful. For a breath-arresting moment, she believed he was entertaining her plea seriously, but, at the end of it, he laughed. "Out in the middle of that," he said, with a gesture toward the lake, "with a gale blowing up, and a rotten little leaky dug-out. Paddling for your cheap life; baling. And then a night on shore, without a fire,—nothing to make it with and not daring to risk it if you had." He drew a deep breath. "No, this is better, when you've got your grip on it."

He turned to her. "We'll travel, Trix. We'll travel a lot. Don't you worry about that. We'll go to places I've never seen, any more than you. Paris, and Madrid, and a place up in the mountains, called St. Moritz, where they have winter sports. We'll have a grand time, little girl, as soon as I dare take my hands off this thing. For a while, I'll have to stick, tight. And that'll give you time to learn the game.

"*Their* game, d'you see, Trix? Because they've got one, and it has to be learned. You'll be able to play it, when you get the hang of it, better than those kids you saw to-day. They were born with it in their mouths; they don't even know it's a game. If they ever had to learn a different one, they'd be lost. But you and I aren't like that. We can show 'em a few things they don't know, when the time comes. Well, how about it? Is that a bargain?"

Anson had come in to announce dinner, and was waiting respectfully and rather spectrally, in the doorway,

for his employer to finish speaking. A serious reply wasn't possible, just then. "Oh, I suppose so," she said, but without any idea that, in doing so, she'd signed a treaty.

But they hadn't been alone over the coffee cups two minutes before her father, reverting to the abandoned theme, proceeded on the assumption that she had. "I'm glad you see it that way, Trix. It's no disgrace to be ignorant of things you care nothing about,—things that can neither please you nor hurt you. But a thing that can please you or a thing that can hurt you, you want to know *all* about. Take this society chicken-feed. It may not seem worth while; it isn't until it can get you somewhere you want to go, or keep you from getting there. If it can, it's important. I've had to study etiquette, of lots of different kinds. My life's depended on it, more than once, in some of the queer places I've been. On my knowing how to do the right thing with a mouthful of grub, for instance.

"Of course, with me, now, it's different. They know I'm hard-boiled, and they suspect I'm dangerous. That's why they put Henry Craven into the company: to watch me. Henry! He's all right, at that. They know, some of 'em, that I'm a better man than they are, and they like me to be what they call 'unconventional.' They have to like it, because they know I can get away with it.

"But you,—I want you to learn *their* game. You can do it; I've seen that, already. But it'll mean watching 'em, learning their tricks. I'd thought of sending you for a year to the same school the Williamson girl goes to, but it seems they're full."

"It's lucky for them they are," she commented. "I've had all the school I want."

"Well, we can consider that later," he said. "But for this summer, there isn't a person who could teach you more or who knows the game better than Henry's sister." He added casually, "We're to go up to the Williamsons' Sunday. That'll give you a notion what they're like."

The girl was sullenly aware that she was being managed. "Miss Craven's going away next week," she said.

"Yes, so Henry told me." He was apparently thinking it out as he went along. "You know, I believe if I gave him a tip, she'd be glad to ask you to come down and visit her. She's got a cottage on the seashore, and she'll probably have lots of room. You see, I'll have to be away a good deal myself, this summer, up in the Northwest; getting ready for our flax and getting it in. How would that strike you?"

Anger was the first thing she felt; an outraged sense that she'd been betrayed, conspired about, between this woman and her father. His pretended candor infuriated her. She didn't answer his question. When she spoke, after a dark silence, it was to ask one of her own.

"Dad, are you going to marry her?"

The shot told, surprisingly. His head went back under the impact of it. "Marry? Who?" he growled.

She took that for rhetoric, and waited.

Presently his face cleared, into a dazzling grin. "You mean Margaret Craven? Is that what you've been worrying about?"

Still watching him intently, she nodded.

"Not till hell freezes over!" he assured her seriously. "Probably not then. But I'd like to know what put it in your head."

Still she wasn't convinced to the point of laying all her cards on the table; he wasn't showing her all his, she was sure. "I didn't see why she should be so friendly when she doesn't like me much,—offering to help me get my clothes, and all. Nor how you could be so sure she'd ask me to visit her."

"Well, it's simple enough when you know," he explained. "She's worried about Henry. He supports her, I guess. I don't think they've got anything else. And she's afraid I'll lead him astray; wants to keep an eye on him. So she has to keep in with me. And the easiest way to keep in with me is by making up to you."

She's a clever woman; she's had to be, I guess. Besides, I think she does like you. She seemed to the other night."

Beatrice pushed back her chair and rose. "All right, dad," she said, "I'll be good. I'll go with her to Cape Cod, or wherever it is." She paused to shoot an impudent grin at him. "You see, she invited me this afternoon. Made me promise to ask you if I might go."

Then, laughing over his look of blank discomfiture, she came round the table and kissed him. But it wasn't the sort of kiss she'd had waiting for him at five o'clock that afternoon.

CHAPTER FIVE

A DETOUR

1

SIMONE GREVILLE once spoke of a group of women, which had included Violet, as perpetual tasters of sensations, mostly mental; passive epicures, waiting to be made to feel. She said she didn't know whether their precocity had exhausted them before they were ripe or whether they had too many ideas to leave room for anything else, but she'd come to believe that an astonishing proportion of them, anyhow, went through life passionless, frigid, missing the great thing altogether.

As applied to Violet, this was pretty good diagnosis, if by Violet one means merely what Violet meant to herself—the only Violet she knew or, until her thirty-ninth year, suspected the existence of.

When, on that notable Sunday morning in May, she'd had her first taste of Joe Greer, she'd consciously admitted nothing—really had been aware of nothing—that differentiated the experience from a series of forays to the pantry that went back twenty years, to her first experiment upon her boy cousin, Henry, undertaken during a summer tour the Prince and Craven families had made among the French chateaux.

Her experiment with John Williamson, while it got from the fact of their marriage a social significance that was revolutionary and, she assumed, permanent, was not, in its psychological aspect, very much more important than some of the others. The first weeks of marriage had

given her some appalling hours, of fright, of revulsion and of a wildly incredulous disappointment. But the subsidence of all this had been an acquiescence, a little ironic but near enough contentment to pass for it. So that was what it was like! Very well; now she knew.

John developed, under her spirited pruning, into, really, an old dear; jolly, just a bit outrageous now and then, indulgent always and sometimes sympathetic. She had an immense pride in his weight and position in the community, and she was deeply impressed by the discovery, once in a while, of something she couldn't make him do. She was "terribly fond of him."

He was easily the most important item in her landscape, but he'd long been, also, the most familiar one. A new item—especially if strange, almost monstrous, as Joe Greer appeared to be—was, naturally, a subject for investigation. John, thank goodness, understood this perfectly. It would have been terribly silly of him, of course, to make a fuss, though there were husbands, Violet was well aware, who did.

Sophisticated as she believed herself to be and as, in the true sense of the word, she was, yet, in the valid experience of life, she was deficient to a degree that might fairly be called perverse if her case were not so common among carefully nurtured American women. What she had told Joe, about going through life waiting for a door to open and coming to the conclusion that there was no door to the thing she was in, had been, so far as she knew, merely a part of her technique, a useful item in her standard repertory, which could be counted upon to get almost any man, even the most reluctant, started. She hadn't the dimmest notion how profoundly true it was.

She didn't feel at all sure she liked the taste of Joe. She found his realistic moments unpleasantly acrid; his egotism, naive; and his prudery,—for she'd been aware that she'd sometimes shocked him,—ridiculous. She admitted the attractiveness of his looks, his surprisingly good speech, his vigor and freshness, and the queer miscellany

that formed his background: the jungle, and the musical comedy stage; that he bought pictures, and had never been to Europe, and knew Sorolla. This was how her palate reported it,—about as a boy's palate reports his first taste of strong drink. She didn't reckon on anything in her, behind her palate and capable of overruling its report, being concerned in the matter. But even on that first morning, she'd been forced to ignore as irrelevant some rather queer sensations and impulses she'd had.

It annoyed her to learn that Joe was a married man with a grown daughter; she lost her temper with John, who told her about it. "He's probably got five or six wives," she rapped out. "One in every port, like a sailor. I suppose one of them is trying to put him in jail and he's come to you.—And I'd bet you've said you'd help him out!"

She would barely listen to John's detailed explanation that Greer's matrimonial difficulties were, comparatively speaking, respectable, and it did not in the least placate her when she heard. "Respectable!" she fumed. "That's the beastly second-rate vulgarity of it. Why do they think they have to *marry* those people?"

When she heard about Beatrice, and Joe's wish to enter her in a smart school, preferably Thornycroft, where Dorothy was, she fairly boiled over. What affair was it of his, or his daughter's, where Dodo went to school? How did he even know of the school unless John had been babbling about it? But of course John had been! Given the man all the details, no doubt, Miss Hood's address, himself as a reference, everything!

"What's the harm if I did?" he asked. "He couldn't get her into that school in a hundred years;—not in ten, anyhow. And next year's all that matters to us." It wasn't this argument, however, that had the effect of pulling his wife up short; it was his look of curiosity at her. What was there for her to be so disturbed about?

She, herself, couldn't understand why she'd been so bitter about it nor why she went on thinking and feeling

that way. She tried to make out that she was angry with herself for being angry, but the intricacies of this abstraction were a little beyond her. Preposterously, what warmed her into a friendlier feeling for the man was the outrageous surmise that the girl mightn't be his daughter, after all, but some little fluff he was trying to palm off upon them, under a cloak no one would think to look beneath. She found this notion rather entertaining, though she didn't take it seriously.—Well, she didn't take him seriously, either!

She didn't pass it on to John, for she had a clear premonition that he wouldn't think it funny. She didn't suppose Margaret Craven would think it funny, either, but this didn't prevent her mentioning it to Margaret, experimentally.

Margaret took it in the most surprising way; fairly flew at her, over it.

"That's like you, Violet," she said, when, after a tight silence, she spoke at all. Her voice was brittle with anger, and her eyes were dry with it. "How long have you been telling that sweet little story?"

The mere impact of the charge took Violet's breath. "I haven't been telling it at all," she protested. "I only just thought of it. It struck me as amusing, and I said it."

"It will be frightfully amusing for her, won't it?" There was no quality of reflection in Margaret's voice, not even the thinnest veneer to give it a surface. "To find a story like that going round! A young girl, alone as she is; even her father a stranger to her."

"It *isn't* going around," Violet reiterated. Then, with a short laugh, as she recovered her balance: "Or if it is, it's not my doings. But it's a natural enough thing for anybody to think of, who knows what he's like. As a possibility, anyhow. After all, how do you know it *isn't* true?"

"I met her last night," Margaret said. "We had dinner there, Henry and I. She happens to look like him, in

the first place. He had a photograph of her before she came; you could even tell from that.—So, if you want a story," she went on, after a breathless pause, "you'd better make it that she's illegitimate. It isn't likely that she brought her mother's marriage certificate with her."

Astonishment over the onslaught had, so far, kept Violet from feeling anything else. Now, however, she was angry, too. "Do you mind telling me," she asked, "what's given you the extraordinary idea that I want a story? What you think I've got to do with it, from first to last?"

Margaret laughed. "Oh, if you've—taken him on, yourself, of course a grown daughter turning up is a nuisance."

"I see," said Violet reflectively. And then, with a laugh, as she rose to get a cigarette, "Well, I guess we've pretty well covered that."

Margaret matched her tone. "I should think we had! I feel as if I'd been in the movies. My cook left this morning; I suppose that's what started it. Have you heard that Paula Wollaston is going to sing at Ravinia, after all? She's left John down in North Carolina and come back for rehearsals. Going to open the season in *Tosca*, Wallace Hood says."

Violet caught the ball expertly, and tossed it back. "Oh, I know the man who will be singing with her. Fournier his name is. Dodo and I met him in New York. Frightfully distinguished-looking,—and attractive."

They went on and ate their prearranged lunch together as if nothing had happened. But just before they parted, Margaret went back, firmly and with a hand as steady as a surgeon's, to the focus of their quarrel.

"She's really rather nice, Joe Greer's daughter. Not quite so much a cat in a strange garret as he was afraid she was going to be. He wants me to look after her a little, and I'm glad to do it. Mind if I ask Dodo to lunch with her some day?"

To Violet, the purport of this was as plain as it was as-

tonishing. If Margaret had said, in so many words, "I think of marrying this man. I've made a start toward getting him. So, if you want to play fair, you'll let him alone,"—she couldn't have made it clearer. As a decent, married middle-aged member of society, Violet had to acknowledge the reasonableness of this request. In some moods, she even accorded a tentative half-approval of the plan. If Joe was in the way to make a serious fortune out of this linen process that looked so good to John, he'd be a pretty good matrimonial risk,—as good as Margaret would ever get a chance to take.

Violet wanted her married. She was still a social asset, for a difficult dinner or a week-end party; but ten years from now,—a little tighter drawn, her wit oftener mordant than refreshingly acidulous, one wouldn't know what to do with her. In such a marriage Margaret, fastidious as she was, would, of course, loathe the man himself. Her first unguarded comments upon him had really been funny. It wasn't likely the instinct of a lifetime could have changed enough in two or three months to make him seem, personally, desirable. It was that prospective fortune Margaret was banking on, a line of reasoning which justified Violet, the first chance she got, in putting the project before John.

Her opening startled him, for she began by asking if the linen business was really a frightfully good thing, and he jumped to the surmise that Joe was trying to unload his stock on some of her friends. It took a minute or two to get him back on the rails.

"It's him I want to know about," she insisted. "Whether he's going to get frightfully rich out of it, or not. Because Margaret means to marry him."

Again it took her a few minutes to get him calmed to the listening point.

Margaret wasn't eloping with him this afternoon; she wasn't even engaged to him. "I didn't say she was *going* to marry him; I said she *meant* to, when the time came.

It's a plan of hers, that's all. Only I thought you might as well know."

Let down, he swung the other way and treated the idea jocularly, as another of her numerous mare's nests. "How did you find out about it? Did she tell you herself?"

"Practically," Violet asserted, and went on with confirmatory details. Margaret had been seeing quite a lot of him; she'd known about his daughter before any of the rest of them,—before the girl came on at all; had seen a photograph of her; they'd dined there again last night, she and Henry, to meet her. "She says the girl's rather nice and she's going to take her up. She's asking Dodo for a lunch for her, next week. Doesn't that look as if she meant something? And if he's going to be really rich," Violet watched her husband intently as she ventured this, "it might not be such a bad thing for her."

She could see that he was upset by the idea, though he went on proclaiming his total disbelief in it. A fine-grained girl like Margaret couldn't be considering Joe Greer as a husband; a man of rough manners, no morals, a brutal temper, not even divorced yet, and fifty years old. And, on top of it all, a mere adventurer, anyhow.

"His age wouldn't bother anybody," she remarked dryly. "And he won't go on being an adventurer, if this linen business makes him rich—really rich, I mean."

"Well, if that's what she's counting on," he grumbled, "she'll wait a while. If she takes my advice, she will."

"Why?" Violet demanded. "Don't you think it's a good thing?"

"Of course I do. Wouldn't have put money into it if I didn't. But that doesn't mean necessarily that *he'll* get rich over it."

He went on, in response to a rather startled look she shot him, to explain. He didn't mean anything sinister by that. Only, with a fellow like Greer, you never could tell. He might fly off the handle any time. "He isn't the sort that naturally gets rich. Sooner or later, he's likely to bite off more than he can chew. Of course, if

she did marry him" He relapsed into an abstracted silence and took two or three drafts on his cigar. "She won't, though, I don't believe," he concluded.

He hadn't taken the idea as hard as he might have been expected to, for the amount he'd done for Margaret, all these years, had made him a bit romantic about her, and he liked having her around, just as she was: at home in his house, on call. He might have vetoed the thing summarily, and ordered it broken up; given his wife *carte blanche* to see that it went no further. Distinctly, he hadn't done that. Margaret had better go slow,—this was all his advice came to; and she'd have to do that, anyhow. Even if the man were divorced to-day, she couldn't marry him legally, here in Illinois, for another year. And any number of things could happen in that time. The thing he'd said that had given Violet most food for thought was that broken sentence, "Of course, if he married Margaret . . ." Had he meant that this would bring Joe, somehow, within the pale? Afford him the protection of another code, so that he'd be allowed to get rich, after all?

Anyhow, the thing for Violet to do—for the next few months—was to let Joe Greer alone. If she as much as looked at him, let alone lifted a finger, Margaret would attribute the probable failure of her project (for what serious attraction could a cold finicky person like Margaret effectively exert upon this genial freebooter?) to her, and, judging by the latest sample of her conduct, act most unreasonably about it. Luckily, it mattered very little to Violet herself; she'd have nothing to do with Joe—for the present, anyhow.

She kept this resolution scrupulously, for a little less than a week; then, on the afternoon of Margaret's lunch for Beatrice, as a result of a chance encounter with him, she broke it rather badly. She'd motored in with Dorothy, having three or four things she wanted to do in town—the most important of these being a call on Eileen Corbett, Gregory's wife, who was at the Presbyterian Hospital having had her appendix out. It was around five o'clock

when she left the hospital. She hadn't gone more than a block or two, when her chauffeur ran over a jagged fragment of a broken milk bottle and blew a tire. He trundled over to the curb, stopped behind a car that was parked there—it had, she thought at the time, a faintly familiar look,—and went to work, in the disgustingly deliberate manner characteristic of chauffeurs, putting on a spare.

It was the hottest part of what had turned out to be a remorselessly hot day, and this particular spot was, she was sure, the hottest in Chicago. The prospect of a fifteen or twenty minutes' wait was irksome. But, before the first of them had passed, Joe appeared, amazingly, descending in the freight elevator from the very building opposite which they'd stopped.

"What on earth are you doing out here?" she cried at sight of him. She cared nothing about an answer; the question was galvanic. All she was aware of was a tingling sensation from the brilliant look he gave her and the feel of the hand which met the one she'd stretched out to him.

But his answer was not perfunctory. "This is the last place I'd expect you to come to," he said. "Even your husband's never paid us a visit here." Then, perceiving the chauffeur's occupation and, in the same instant, interpreting her puzzled frown, he explained, "Why, this is our laboratory. I thought, for a minute, you'd come out to see what our linen process was like."

"I didn't even know you had a laboratory," she said. "What is it like? A laboratory always sounds exciting."

"This one isn't," he told her derisively.

"It's so beastly hot right here," she began, "that almost anything . . ."

"It's hotter up there," he broke in. "And it stinks to heaven. I wish there were some place—" The roar of a passing elevated train checked his speech, but he went on staring at her thoughtfully until it passed. "—I wish there were some cool quiet place that I could take you to, and make you comfortable, and give you a drink—or a

cup of tea. But if there's such a place within a mile of here, I don't know it."

She agreed with him about the frightfulness of the West Side and then told him idly that her father-in-law's old house, where John had lived until they married, was just round the corner. She was still in the possession of his look, and feeling half resentful and half amused over the way it had appropriated her. At this, however, he laughed outright and his gaze abandoned her.

"The human animal can change a lot in one generation, can't it?" he observed. "They tell a wonderful lot of stories about old Nick. It's queer to think you must have known him."

This irreverence gave her, of course, an excellent chance to snub him, put him in his place, and begin keeping, once more, her forgotten resolution. But instead of trying anything like this, she said, "Know him! I should think I did;" then laughed, and added, "You'd have got on with him."

"I expect he was more my kind than your husband is," Joe commented soberly. But the next moment he grinned straight into her face and said, "I'll bet you got on with him yourself, like a house afire."

He gave her no chance to deal with this, for by now he'd got an idea. There was no need of her sitting here, sweltering. He could take her in his car wherever she had been going and hers could follow and pick her up as soon as it was in running order.

"Why, I've nowhere to go," she told him, with a faint smile, "except Lake Forest."

He took her up. "I've plenty of time and gas. Come along!"

But this was rather farther than she cared to go. "I'll tell you what you can do though, if you've really time to rescue me; you can take me to our town house. There's no one there but the care-takers, but a closed-up house is always the coolest place there is."

She couldn't tell whether this amendment relieved or

disappointed him. He merely nodded, and held the door while she instructed her chauffeur. "Come to Astor Street for me, Jeffrey," she said. "But you'd better get a new spare tire, first." Joe showed no sign of noting, either, that this order of hers substantially protracted the time she'd have to wait. It really meant nothing to him, of course, because she hadn't the least idea of asking him to wait with her.

He kept her wondering about him all the way home. She wondered why he didn't follow the obvious boulevard route instead of threading his way among the West Side streets and then whipping her across West Chicago Avenue. Did he feel there was something necessarily clandestine about taking another man's wife for a ride in his car? Or had he the idea of showing her how the other half—that once had been his—lived? He showed an unexpected, and likable, friendliness toward the people, especially the children, who swarmed these streets. He shouted jokes at the ball players whose games their passage interrupted and waved a brotherly hand to youngsters who gazed, awestruck, at the glories of his car. He drove fast but with unexpected care. And he made no effort to talk to her. As they turned into Chicago Avenue, he nodded toward a plain brick building and told her it was another laboratory, Hugh Corbett's. "There's one of your bunch I'd like really to know," he said; and when she asked, with a laugh, "The only one?" he let the question go with no more answer than an unsmiling look.

It had a queer effect upon her, making suddenly palpable a vague sense she'd had ever since she sat down beside him in the car, of something unexplored she had in common with him. That look was his acknowledgment of it. "You won't tell, and I won't ask, but we understand each other." That's what it said.

She had to direct him to her house, and something about his smile, when she commented on the oddity of his not knowing where she lived, decided her to invite him in. There was a dash of mischief about it, too, for she saw he

didn't know how much or how little she meant by it. "Oh, come in," she insisted. "You deserve a chance to get cool after rescuing me like that; and it's only for a few minutes." But not even the drink she provided put him at ease.

Experimentally, with the rewarded purpose of surprising him, she spoke of his daughter, whom he, apparently, had no intention of mentioning. "Margaret's been telling me how nice she is.—Why have you kept her dark?" But the surprise proved a boomerang. After his first start, he took time to frame a deliberate answer which left her gasping.

"It wasn't because I'm ashamed of her. It was because I don't know where you and I stand. I don't care what you take *me* for, a pirate or a cannibal—anything you like." There was nothing humorous about this; his tone was almost menacing. "But she's no—cannibal princess! And if I can help it, she isn't going to be taken that way."

Violet knew exactly the manner she wanted to meet this onslaught, but she found herself unable to command it. She was trembling; she felt the blood burning in her face. She thought Margaret must have betrayed her. "I don't know," she faltered, "what any one may have told you I've said . . ."

"No one has told me anything," he broke in. "Who would? Who knew?—Except the Cravens." He stopped for a thoughtful smile. "No, Margaret hasn't said anything," he went on. "It was just the smell in the air."

She was, she assured herself, furious with him for having shaken her like that. It was what one deservedly got for playing with outsiders. She'd turn him out—summarily make an end of him—if it weren't that Jeffrey's arrival with the car—any minute, now—would save her the trouble. But, all the while, she was in the grip of a sort of nightmare obsession that, if he wanted to, now, he'd come over to her and take her in his arms and she wouldn't even try to hold him off. And that he knew she wouldn't.

Instead of this fantastic happening, he sat back more at his ease than he'd been before, and reflectively went on talking. He began with a disarming apology for having startled her. He'd spoken out more plainly than she was used to, but he hadn't done it wantonly. There was something he wanted her to understand.

"I've always been a law unto myself," he said. "That's the only kind of a person I could be. If you're like that, you've got to make up your mind not to care a damn what any one else thinks of you or of the things you do. It's the only possible line to take, if you stop to think. But that doesn't mean that I've been satisfied with everything I've done. I've done some things that were pretty low down. I've treated some people that way. One of them was my wife. I deserted her before Beatrice was born. Before I knew she was going to be born. She was almost a year old before I knew I had a daughter.—Well, I can't make anything up to my wife. She hates me; always did. I'm the last sort of man in the world for her to have married. You must have seen things happen like that yourself. But I can make it up to the girl, and I'm going to do it. She hasn't had much of a life up to now, but now it's going to begin. The best there is—of everything. It may not be all smooth sailing, at first. I thought I'd put her in the same school your daughter goes to, but they've written to say they're full."

His skeptical manner gave her a clue. "I'm sure that's true," she said. "We had to enter Dorothy at Thornycroft years before she was ready to go. Everybody does.—I suppose that's why you thought you didn't know where you—stood, as you said, with me."

"The trouble with you is," she went on after a silence, "that you think you're still in the jungle."

"And are you telling me I'm not?" he asked. "Shall I begin trusting everybody?"

A disconcerting memory flashed into her mind of the way John had said that the great possibilities of the linen business didn't mean, necessarily, that Joe was going to

be rich. She laughed. "Trust your friends, anyhow," she said, adding, after another pause, "And don't let Margaret Craven monopolize that nice daughter of yours. Bring her up to see us Sunday morning. Everybody comes, more or less, to swim and play tennis and so on, and stays to lunch."

He showed himself frankly pleased by the invitation, but, perversely, this was not the note she wanted to part with him upon. She added a final touch. "I'll see that Margaret's there—for you," she said.

He made, in words, no reply to this, but his look took hold of her again and for a good long moment held her tight, so that, once more, she felt the blood burn in her face. She'd been kissed with a good deal less intimacy than that came to. He didn't offer even the formal contact of a hand-shake; merely nodded at her and went away, wearing his most brilliant grin.

He left her ruffled, breathless, and uncertain whether she was angry or elated. She tried to establish the former by fastening upon an object, but there was no one, really, but herself to be angry with—unless one put the blame on Margaret for entertaining foolish hopes and trying to maintain preposterous prohibitions. It was idiotic to take the affair as seriously as that. She couldn't see that she would hurt Margaret's chances a bit by taking Joe in and being decently friendly with him. Wasn't Margaret's only possible attraction for him based on the class she belonged to? If he liked them all, learned that conventional behavior had its—mitigations, wouldn't he be a lot more likely to ask Margaret to, as it were, make an honest man of him?

His daughter was a tiresome complication, of course, but it had been rather thrilling, the way he'd talked about her, and perhaps Margaret had been truthful in saying she wasn't so bad.

The only thing to be watchful of was the possibility of her having a bad influence on Dorothy. (Violet had convulsive moments of taking the responsibilities of mother-

hood very seriously indeed.) But Dorothy's report of the luncheon put that misgiving away. Violet had to ask for it, for Dodo, after two days on the Wollaston farm with Sylvia, had forgotten all about the girl.

"Oh, at Margaret's lunch! Why, she's all right." This was said through a yawn. "She knows all about finger-bowls and things. Dressed to kill, rather. I think she meant us to understand from something she said while Margaret was out of the room, that she means to vamp Henry.—Shouldn't wonder if she could, too."

"Is she—all right, do you think?" Violet put the question dubiously, not quite sure what the girl would think she meant by it, nor, to tell the truth, exactly what she did mean. But the confidential atmosphere in which the words were enveloped was what mattered.

"Oh, she isn't—poisonous, if that's what you mean," the child assured her. "She's all—right; only not much. It's sort of too bad, too, because I think her father must be rather a lark."

"Well, it's a case of love me, love my dog," Violet remarked. "If you want to get on with him, don't try to treat her like a cannibal princess, because he won't have it.—They're coming up, Sunday," she added.

"If she was anywhere near as amusing as a cannibal princess, it would be easier," said Dodo dispassionately, "but I'll do my best, mother."

2

Sunday at the Williamsons' went off, Joe decided, very well. (Margaret, it may be noted, was not there, "for him.") There was nothing, even in the smell of the air, to suggest that Beatrice was being taken as a cannibal princess. She seemed, whenever his eyes fell upon her, to be having not only a jolly time but to be making, especially with the boys, a real success. She was in the pool, most of the time before lunch, getting taught, enthusiastically, to swim.

After lunch, he lost sight of her for a while, but she

turned up, just as he was beginning to wonder about her, in the company of a white-flanneled youngster with whom she seemed on very good terms. He had dark red curly hair; his features, without being insignificant, were small and fine, so that he'd have made an unusually pretty girl, though his build was sturdy enough. He walked with a well-marked limp.

Joe heard him call her Trixie, and took his first opportunity to ask, not of the girl herself, who he was. His informant was Mrs. Hugh Corbett.

"He's Lansing Ware," she told him, but stopped at that, short of giving him any further details.

Joe asked if he'd been wounded in the war, and noted a momentary hesitation about her reply.

"He was in the Aviation," she said. "He got that stiff ankle in an accident at his training camp, quite early. I don't know exactly what it was." She added at once, "I'll always be grateful to his sister, Muriel. She gave me a chance to be a bridesmaid at Anne Corbett's wedding by getting a stye just before the day of the ceremony."

Joe asked no more questions about his daughter's cavalier. The boy was placed, implicitly, as one of the "regular" people he wanted her to know, and that "Trixie," along with his rather intimate way with her, was as far as he could see, merely part and parcel of the manners current here.

Driving home with her, that afternoon, after a few miles of thoughtful silence, he told her she needn't, unless she liked, go to Cape Cod with Margaret—oh, perhaps for a week or two later. Joe was vaguely aware that it had been in the course of his one talk with Violet that he'd changed his plans for his daughter's summer. Yet he'd hardly have said then that Violet was responsible for the change, let alone that she'd suggested it.

The visit had not produced quite the sort of step in his acquaintance with Violet that he'd looked forward to. She hadn't carried him off for a walk, nor withdrawn with

him to the shade of that grove of oaks to look down upon the show she'd once promised him. She'd been, decidedly, one of the performers in it all the while. Her duties as hostess had been made heavier, too, by the presence, among the guests, of three or four opera singers just arrived for the Ravinia season, one of them especially—a Frenchman named Fournier who spoke no English and needed careful management to keep him from getting stranded. But Joe hadn't felt slighted. Even her unconcern had suggested a certain friendliness, and, on the terrace after lunch, she'd openly made an opportunity for a talk with him.

His first sight of her that morning had affected him powerfully, too, renewing the bewildered incredulity, the discoverer's excitement and the strong sensuous attraction that he'd felt the morning she appeared at the traps. She was in the pool, when he and Beatrice arrived, among the earliest of the day's visitors, and it was literally true that, for a moment, after she'd climbed the ladder at the deep end and come to greet them, he didn't know her. The tight blue rubber bathing-cap which confined her hair, and the clinging wet sheen of the swimming suit, no more ample than one her daughter would have worn, triumphantly challenged youth itself. She'd smiled at his stare, and laughed at his explanation of it. Dorothy, who had escorted them down from the house, said dispassionately to Beatrice, "You see how hopeless it is. Now do you wonder I don't call her mother?" Joe did not, at all events. She seemed, standing there—erect, unsmiling, a little detached, the older of the two.

His vision of Violet,—revealed, Diana-like, finer and whiter and silkier than his imagination would have dared pretend, persisted. It was not far in the background of his thoughts, while they talked on the terrace. Yet this sensuous appeal was not the only one, nor perhaps, the strongest, she'd made to him. He'd enjoyed the friendly good-humor of her ready laugh; her sallies of what might pass, unscrutinized, for wit; her light-handed way of re-

disposing people when the old groupings were growing a little stale.—She took it easier than Margaret, and therefore did it better.

He was pleasantly stirred by her relation with her daughter,—the spectacle they sometimes presented of a complete reversal of rôles. The pair understood each other, down to the ground, and were, no doubt, deeply fond of each other, though they never expressed that fact in any of the orthodox ways. He wondered how it would seem to have Beatrice calling him Joe, but decided he wouldn't like it. There were scores of girls who'd done that, at one time or another, but she was the only one who called him dad. But, as between Violet and Dorothy, where none of these echoes intruded, it bespoke a charming confidence which couldn't have been built up in the absence of a sympathetic understanding on the part of the mother.

Violet had given him, too, one evidence of friendly concern that touched him. She'd remembered the wish he'd expressed to meet Hugh Corbett, and had made, it seemed, a special effort to secure Hugh and his wife to-day for the purpose of bringing this meeting about. (Joe had had a wonderful talk with Hugh, having found in him one whose imagination could do justice to cellulose fiber,—one to whom it mightn't just as well have been putty, or prunes.)

The sum of all this was that, when Violet told him to pull that chair a little farther around the corner into a position more easily overlooked, and then sat down in it with the expressed hope that they might have a few minutes to themselves, his jungle wariness was in abeyance. She spoke at once about Beatrice, in terms, of course, of praise. Fascinating, she called her, and a dear. Delightful to look at, too, clothes and all, and with a freshness about her most engaging. To the father's charmed ear there was nothing suggestive of the cannibal princess in any of this. He let himself begin to talk, more freely than he'd ever supposed he could talk with a woman who attracted him as this one did, about the girl, his hopes for her, the problems she presented. And in this connection,

he told her how Margaret figured in the design, and about the contemplated summer on Cape Cod.

All he perceived, at first, was that Violet saw some aspect of this plan that hadn't occurred to him—and that she was quietly finding a source of amusement in it. Yet it wasn't as if she were laughing at him. There was a gleam of mischief about her almost suppressed smile which hinted that she'd like to share the joke with him, if she dared.

He didn't ask her to tell him what the joke was. His returning wariness warned him, indeed, not to let her guess he saw she had one. What he did ask her was whether she didn't think an association like that was just what the girl needed.

"Why, yes, I suppose so," Violet assented dubiously, "only I'm not sure it isn't a little—austere. The place they're going is awfully quiet; Rose and Rodney never go there except when they want to get away from absolutely everybody. The only people there are some professors and a writer or two. And, of course, a complete rest is what Margaret is supposed to need. So, if the girl's been having—well, rather a thin time, this might strike her as not very jolly.—She's adoring it here, to-day; any one could see that."

She went on, with an earnestness he couldn't account for, to sing Margaret's praises, as if she feared that what she'd just said might have done her cousin a disservice, thrown out of gear some plan of hers. "We've always thought she was a perfect wonder, John and I. The way she waited hand and foot on her mother all those years—fifteen anyhow, after Uncle Chauncey died; and managed, and kept afloat—even kept her looks,—through it all. It takes a real person to do that; I couldn't have, I know. I'd have looked a hag, if I'd been through half what Margaret has. And *she* couldn't have stood much more of it. She must have been just about desperate—never showing a thing, of course; she never does—when you came along with that invention of yours, and made a real job for Henry."

Joe remarked, with a grin, that he hadn't done anything

for Henry, except by being the sort of person John Williamson had thought it necessary to appoint somebody to watch.

She colored a little at this, he thought, but went on without contradicting it. "Well, anyhow, I don't want to interfere with any plan of Margaret's. If she wants—Beatrice, to brighten things a bit and—well, be a sort of mother to, I hope you'll let her have her. And, of course," she concluded, getting up to receive the farewell of an approaching guest, "if you could manage to run down there for a while, that would be great,—for everybody."

"I'd thought of sending Henry," he began, and it wasn't until then that he saw the recurrent gleam of that enigmatic smile of hers upon her lips. He no longer sought to interpret it; dismissed, indeed, the interpretation that suggested itself as damn nonsense. But there came a faint reflection of the same smile in his face, and it recurred when he told Beatrice she needn't count on Margaret and Cape Cod for this summer unless she liked. "Wanted to be a sort of mother to her," eh? Violet might be mistaken as to her cousin's plan, but she had given him, he'd come by then to believe, a useful tip.

3

The change of the plan for Trixie's summer amazed Joe and thoroughly alarmed him by bringing about his first quarrel with his daughter. She'd struck him as being oddly non-committal, even ungracious, about it, on the way home from Lake Forest, and, at one point in his explanation of the change—it was substantially a restatement of Violet's objections, though the source of them was not acknowledged,—she'd uttered a short laugh and had refused to tell him why. But he was in no mood for fault-finding with her, and, dropping the subject, wooed her back into an affectionate humor with him by telling her stories and taking her for a long ride. They swung out west to the Fox River valley, and, by avoiding the crowded thoroughfares, as his minute knowledge of the

roads enabled him to do, they had a delightful cruise. For the last hour, she lay contentedly against his shoulder, so soft and still that he believed her to be asleep; while he, incredulous of the happiness this long delayed experience in fatherhood had brought him, could have thought he was dreaming, too.

Two or three evenings later, without misgiving, he brought up the matter of Margaret again, this time as a question comfortably disposed of. He was glad, indeed, of something tangible to discuss with her that night, for a trifling incident upon his return from the office, just before dinner, had been rankling absurdly in his mind ever since.

Anson, on letting him in and being asked where she was, had expressed the correctly servile "belief" that she was at the telephone. A minute later, Joe had met her coming down the hall, kissed her with his accustomed hug, and then, merely by way of saying something, asked her whom she'd been telephoning to. She answered, instantly, "I wasn't telephoning"; adding, a moment later, "Oh, it was just a wrong number."

The thing had been buzzing in his brain ever since like a plaguey mosquito. The servants in that somewhat over-staffed establishment were supposed to answer the phone, and Beatrice, lazy and disposed to lounge when there was no particular call upon her energy, didn't make a practise of snatching their duties away from them; she was distinctly reveling, poor child, in the unaccustomed luxury of having things done for her. Then the form of Anson's reply suggested a real conversation. And had there been about the look of the girl, when her eye first fell upon him, a somewhat flurried air? No, damn it, there had not! That was a mere imagining, promoted by jealousy that went along with a strong new-born love like his. But why hadn't she said it was a wrong number in the first place, rather than at the end of a palpable hesitation. There must be a dozen ways of explaining the contradiction, only he couldn't think of one nor could he make

up his mind to ask her. It was with a sense of escape from all this that he launched a subject that could be talked about.

"You needn't worry any more about that Cape Cod idea," he told her. "That's all fixed. I told Henry, yesterday, that I meant to keep you round with me for a while before you went anywhere; but he gave me a sort of a hint that I'd better talk it over with Margaret, myself, so I dropped in there to-night on the way home. The invitation's still open; any time you want to go down there for a week or two, we're to let her know a few days ahead. But she understands it won't be for the summer."

Beatrice said rather dryly, "I suppose she's broken-hearted about that." He suppressed a momentary irritation over the tone she'd taken and answered simply that Margaret was disappointed, all right, but that she'd been perfectly friendly about it.

"They're all perfectly friendly with you, seems to me," the girl commented.

Joe said he was glad they were. "One thing I've learned in fifty years, is to take the best advice I can get, whenever I'm off my own beat. And there's probably nothing I'm more ignorant about than bringing up young girls. So, if Margaret or Jennie MacArthur or Mrs. Williamson feels friendly enough to offer me any suggestions, I'm just that much ahead. So far as I know, there aren't any professional consultants in that field, though it's plain there ought to be."

All this was said into a vacuum. She'd turned, petulantly, her back upon him and gave no indication even that she'd heard. His patience under this sort of treatment would have amazed Jennie MacArthur.

"I don't know just how we're going to manage things," he went on, a propitiatory good-humor transforming the words. "It's the biggest handful I ever tackled. You see, you can't live here alone very well, with just the servants, if only for the look of the thing. It looks to me as if the thing to do was to hire some middle-aged woman

to be a sort of governess-companion for your housekeeper on the side. Then I could go away, when I had to, without leaving you high and dry. I'm going to have to be away a good deal too, this summer and fall especially. Even when I'm not away, you're alone too much in the daytime. She could take you to matinées,—all sorts of places where you wouldn't want to go alone. And mornings, she could give you lessons. She'd want to be the right sort, of course. But there wouldn't be much trouble about that; there are plenty of them to choose among,—some English woman, I suppose, would be best."

Still without looking around at him, she asked, "What kind of lessons? History, and French, and things like that?"

Her tone was muffled, ambiguous; and it was this, more than anything else, that made him hesitate. "Why, I suppose so," he answered dubiously.

"Manners, too!" she inquired. "How to talk with an English accent, and never raise my voice? And what kind of clothes to wear, so that that nasty little Dorothy Williamson can't laugh at me behind my back?"

"Look here, Trix," he commanded. "We've been over this before. You agreed to learn their game. It's no disgrace not to know it, but it's silly to make a fuss about learning it, when to go on not knowing it will put you at a disadvantage. It won't be hard to do. I know a girl who learned enough of it to get by with, on the stage, in one summer. And she was a real rough-neck, to begin with; an illiterate little musical-comedy kid, in the chorus till she worked up an imitation stunt they let her do. She got a chance at a part she wanted, but a friend of hers told her that, to make good with it, she'd have to change her voice, speech, way of moving around,—everything. Instead of getting sore, she sailed in to do it; spent a whole summer where she had the right sort of people around, and she didn't miss a trick. Watched how they did things; listened to everything they said; and, when the piece went into production, she walked on and knocked

'em cold. And she had the time of her life learning it, too, she said.

"You would, too, if you'd take it like that. But, if you go around flinching at everything and imagining people are laughing at you, you can be damn unhappy. It is imagination, mostly, with you. Certainly no one was laughing at you last Sunday, up at Williamsonson's."

She whipped round upon him with a furious contradiction. "They were! A whole lot you know about it! You weren't there to see."

"I could see you were having what sounded like a good time."

"I laughed too loud, I suppose," she commented. "Oh, some of the fellows were decent enough. But the girls, especially your darling Dodo . . . Oh, she makes me sick!"

"She's no darling of mine," he declared—with a grin, for the notion that Trix might be jealous amused him. "Go after her, if you don't like her. Beat her at her own game. Take her boys away from her. Show her up.—Only you won't do it by wishing you could. Let me hire you the right sort of governess and after she's showed you the ropes you'll be able to give Dodo the laugh."

"That isn't what you want her for," the girl said, with sulky conviction, at the end of a long stare. "You want her because those women have been telling you how horrible it is for me to have any fun my own way; going anywhere alone, or taking drives with nobody but George.—George Burns, I mean."—This in answer to his sharply interrogatory frown.—"I suppose Dodo would call him Burns. They've made you ashamed of me, too, I guess. That's why you think I'm like that musical-comedy kid, you told me about. Did you hire a governess for her?"

"Don't be a fool, Trix!" He hadn't meant to be as sharp as that, though, and he paused to get control of a quieter manner. "I'm sorry, but I guess you didn't know how that sounded. Nobody's said a word to me about Burns, and I'd never thought of there being any special

harm in it, but of course you ought to have some one besides a professional chauffeur with you when you go out on long drives. And when it comes to entertaining your friends here, you can't have young men coming to see you and finding you alone; nobody but the servants. Even for going anywhere at night, when I'm away, you'll want some one. I hadn't thought it through as far as that, before. We'll call that settled, I guess, Trix."

But he saw it was anything but settled, in his daughter's mind. "All my life," she said, with a sort of vicious quietness, "I've had people sticking their noses into the things I was doing, telling tales on me, making mother say I couldn't do this or it was wrong to do that. And now, you talk about hiring some one to do just that thing. Well, it isn't what I came here for. If you trusted me, you wouldn't mind having people coming to see me without a chaperon spying on me all the time. But you don't trust me; that's the trouble. You asked me to-night who I'd been telephoning to. It wasn't anybody,—but if it had been I wouldn't have told you."

She was, beyond concealment, crying now, and this phenomenon, while it paralyzed him, seemed to rob her of even the wish for self-control. "You wouldn't have thought of it, yourself," she sobbed. "It's all been put into your head—that I'm a freak that has to be taught how to act, and watched to see that I don't do anything awful.—Jennie MacArthur and Mrs. Williamson—and 'Margaret'!"

She crumpled her handkerchief into her fist and beat on the table with it. "I'm not going to have your mistresses telling you what I'm to do," she cried. "Nor an old maid that's trying to marry you, either!"

He reached across and seized her by the arms. "What the devil do you mean by that?" he roared at her. She wasted no breath answering; her single-minded purpose was to break out of his grip. Her teeth were locked, her face flushed, her eyes blazing. "You listen!" he went on during a panting lull in the struggle. "If you were a

boy, you'd get the finest licking of your young life for saying a thing like that. Being a girl, you oughtn't to know enough to say it. But this is the fact, and don't you ever forget it. Jennie MacArthur is as good a woman as your mother is. And for anything I know about it one way or the other, Mrs. Williamson is, too. You little wildeat! Stop fighting and I'll let you go."

But with an unexpected sudden wrench that pulled him a little off balance, she broke away. "I don't have to stay here," she panted from the doorway. "I can go back to California. I've got the rest of that thousand dollars —where you can't find it." Another sob got in the way of whatever more she had to tell him, and she fled to her room and slammed the door behind her.

She left her father completely disorganized, like a man just awakened from a nightmare, tremors running through his muscles in ripples, his mouth dry, and the only thought he was capable of, an incredulous assertion that it couldn't have happened.

He had been wont to argue with Jennie that quarrels did him good, opened his pores, stimulated his mind, made even his disposition more benevolent. It was nonsense to pretend that there was anything poisonous about them. Evidently, though, quarrels with his daughter went into a special class.

The sober processes of reflection, when he had cooled down enough to make them possible, brought him little comfort. He had a sense of irreparable injury done to a precious fragile thing. It might be patched together after a fashion, but it could never again be as it had been before. He felt no abiding anger against the girl,—was unable, indeed, to remember what she had done to provoke his explosion. He loved and admired her more than ever; her courage in fighting him off, defying him, even while his hands had gripped her. No tears, then! No hint of surrender.

For hours, he sat in the chair he'd risen from to spring upon her, smoking, sipping whisky, meditating in

a mood of deepening melancholy. Jennie MacArthur had warned him that his plan wouldn't work, and it looked as if Jennie, once more, was right. It would have worked, though, but for his infernal temper. The girl was like him; was more, in every way, his daughter than either of them had dreamed possible. They might, if he had not smashed the possibility to bits, to-night, have become the finest sort of comrades—an alliance, defensive and offensive, against the world! He'd like to prove Jennie wrong, for once.

Where the devil, he wondered, had Trix picked up that fantastic idea about him and Jennie? She couldn't have thought of such a thing by herself. Some one must have told her the slander in so many words. He'd manage to find out who the traitor was, if it was the last—no, the next to the last—thing he ever did.

He got up, stiffly, feeling old, and went out into the passage on his way to bed. Outside his daughter's door he stopped to listen. Until that moment, it hadn't occurred to him to wonder how she had spent the intervening hours. Had they been as miserable for her as for him? Had she been weeping quietly over her own defeated hopes? The thought brought a lump into his throat.

She wasn't weeping now. It was dead still in there. Then came her voice, young, clear, unruffled. "Is that you, dad?" His own would not at once respond to command, and she went on, "If it is, come in." It was an invitation he'd never had, nor sought, before.

She switched on the night lamp as he entered, and patted the edge of the bed as the place where she wanted him to sit. When he was seated, she held out both hands to him, displaying the full length of her bare arms. His finger prints were upon them both, in the livid discoloration of bruises.

"Good God, Trix," he cried, aghast, "did I do that to you?"

She nodded, with a smile of friendly mischief. "I bruise awfully easy," she explained. "Sometimes when it

hasn't hurt at all. It's been kind of lucky, in a way. It kept grandfather and the rest from getting rough with me. They never punished me except by shutting me up, and I could usually get out, somehow."

"You *can't* go back to that," he said.

"No," she admitted soberly. "I couldn't go back there, even if Mr. Whittington wasn't going to marry mother. But I can go back to Hollywood. I'm practically sure I can get a job there."

"Then you *can't* forgive me?" he asked.

"Of course I do!" She seemed astonished at the question. "It was mostly my fault, anyhow. It seemed as if I just *had* to get you mad. I don't know why—exactly. But I'm crazy about you, dad. I think you're the most wonderful man in the world."

"Then why," he demanded, "do you talk about going off and leaving me? Is it just because I wanted to hire a —companion for you?"

She stirred uneasily at the question; it wasn't one, apparently, that she had a categorical answer for. "I could have got on well enough with my mother," she said at last, "if grandpa and grandma hadn't kept butting in all the time, putting ideas into her head and making her go back on things she'd promised. I *hate* nosy interfering people, whoever they are.—So when I saw those women deciding things for you—about me—changing you round just as they liked, it made me so mad I didn't care what happened." She added, after a moment's pause, "I'm glad I found out about—Miss MacArthur, though."

"Trix," he asked, "do you mind telling me—it's just a matter of curiosity—who put an idea like that into your head? It was a hell of a thing to do, whoever did it."

"Why, nobody did it," she declared, instantly, wide-eyed. "Nobody but you and her. The way you acted together, her calling you Joe and knowing such a lot about me and telling you you needn't stay and work that day unless you liked. When you were supposed to be her boss! And the way you liked it, and wanted to sit around and

talk. I don't know. It struck me as natural, that was all."

"But how could it? That's what I want to know. How could you think of a thing like that? Or don't you know what it means?—I can't even talk to you about it."

She smiled up at him, incredibly composed, gentle with his embarrassment. "Dad," she remonstrated, "am I supposed to think you've lived all these years since you left mother—like a monk in a monastery?"

Had he been a mere disinterested bystander, his fine ear might have spotted that line as a quotation, picked up, treasured,—rehearsed perhaps. As it was, nothing of the sort occurred to him. He stared at her in astonished silence while she, having got the whip hand of him now, went on:

"You hate having me know things like that, and if I was going to stay with you I suppose I'd have to pretend I didn't. I guess that's the real reason I can't. You want a nice little girl, and I don't believe I ever was that. I always hated to be bossed. I wanted to find things out for myself. But everything they found I wanted to do, they told me I mustn't. They were afraid I was going to be like you and they were trying to break my will. They didn't, though," She paused to smile at him. "I guess I turned out like you, after all."

"Bless your heart!" he murmured.

His vision of her blurred with tears, and at the invitation of her hands he bent down and kissed her, she holding him, for a moment, in a tight embrace. Then she pushed him away and with her palms blotted the tears from her own eyes.

"I hated you, once," she said, with a shaky laugh. "Oh, for years and years. Because you left me there with them. I didn't think I was going to love you when I got your letter. The reason I came was because you said I was of age and had a right to decide things for myself. I made up my mind I'd hold you to that. I thought if I got you sort of silly about me, it would be easy to make you. I

didn't figure on getting—silly about you. But I have, and that's why I've got to go away again."

He tried to protest that this conclusion was nonsense, but she wasn't ready to hear him yet. "I'd hate any governess you hired for me. I'd hate anybody who told you tales about me—or advised you what to do with me. I wouldn't mind if I didn't love you. I'd get what I wanted, somehow,—just the way I always did at home. But I'd be m-miserable—treating you like that.—Because you aren't like them."

She was weeping now in a way that made continued speech impossible. She sat erect and clung to him. "Oh, dad," she wailed, "I don't *want* to go."

Until she was quiet he held her without a word, but when the soothing of his hands had had its effect, he said, "All right, Trix. You win. I guess I've been a fool about it. I hope so, anyway. But I can't let you go. Not after this!"

Her eyes were luminous through her tears. He'd never, he thought, seen anything so rapturously lovely. "You mean it, dad?" she cried. "You'll let me be a real grown-up? Run your house for you, and everything?—Like Margaret Craven does Henry's?"

He roared at that, and she laughed with him, but at the end of it she asked, for reassurance, "Really, dad?"

"It's on the level," he told her soberly. "You can write your own contract, little girl."

There was another damned echo in that, and it was a moment before her enthusiasm got an appropriate response from him. She shook him by the shoulders. "Say you think it's going to be wonderful," she commanded.

"Yes, my dear," he said; "I believe it is."

4

John Williamson surprised Joe by coming to him with an idea about flax. An eccentric gentleman farmer he knew had been talking to him and, more or less, frightening him about it. He was a retired wholesale grocer,

Nicholson by name, and he had a big place out on the Fox River. He devoted an energetic leisure to the cultivation of hobbies, semi- or pseudo-scientific, and he'd been experimenting, for the past two or three years—since a fortuitous war refugee had given him the idea,—with the growing of Belgian flax, the plan being to process it by hand and provide a domestic winter occupation for farmers' wives.

He was bitterly skeptical about Joe's project for making any use of American seed flax, and he went on to say some things that worried John a little. Flax was very funny stuff; it was supposed to exhaust the soil. This was why, in America, it had always been a pioneer crop. Fresh-broken, virgin soil could stand it; even, apparently, benefited by it; but two or three seasons was all it was good for. The growth became sickly, and the crop had to be abandoned altogether. The center of American flax production was always on the move, westward, in search of new land.

Nicholson had got hold of a theory that flax didn't really exhaust the soil; it was specially liable to disease, the fact was, and the germs of the disease accumulated in the old fields from year to year until they killed the crop. But it didn't work that way abroad. They had grown flax in the same fields in Belgium for hundreds of years. Nicholson was confident that he had explained the difference. In Europe, they harvested the crop by hand. And they didn't cut it off above the ground either; they pulled it up by the roots,—and, by so doing, baffled the disease germs.

If he was right about this, and there was no doubt in his own mind about it, here was the end of any dream, such as John had put his money into, of a large-scale mechanical production of linen. It was decreed by God to be a hand process, from the very harvesting of the crop. The old Scotch grocer had a strong strain of Presbyterian religion in him, though he swore like a sergeant in the National Guard.

"He filled me full of details," John concluded, "and I can't remember them; but that's the bones of it. I'd like to take you out to meet him some time, and hear for yourself what he's got to say."

Joe said, seriously, that he'd be very glad to go. There was nothing new about old Nicholson's facts, and nothing very alarming about his theories, but he'd be worth talking to anyhow, and his stand of Belgian flax worth seeing. If that stuff could be made to grow in this soil and climate, it might be worth a lot to them.

He didn't mention to John that, for three months, he had put in odd hours designing a harvester that would pull flax up by the roots not for the purpose of baffling the disease germs but of adding four inches or so to the length of the fiber. He was always as secretive with his immature idea as a cat with her blind kittens.

"All right," said John, "we'll plan to go out there some time within the next week or so."

"Why not call him up," Joe asked, "and see if he's there now? If he's really got anything to tell me, the sooner I know it, the better. Unless you've got something to do that you can't get out of," he added, for John looked dubious and unhappy.

"Why, I have, as a matter of fact," he said, uncertainly.

Joe grinned in his beard. He could manage it to-morrow, he said, though it was a pretty full day. And he was going north to-morrow night.

"To-morrow's impossible for me," said John. "Oh, damn it, yes, I'll make it to-day. If Nicholson's there. I'd promised Dodo I'd go to a ball-game with her—Giants and the Cubs. But she'll let me off, I guess."

Nicholson was at home and would be glad to see them. So the date with Dorothy had to be broken. (Joe made a mental note to tell Trix about this and a promise to take her to the game to-morrow. Ball-games were a thing he hadn't thought of as a resource for her.) The two ate lunch together and immediately afterward, in Joe's road-

ster, drove out the Elgin road to Nicholson's. It was a fine hot July day, sultry and rather still, with the possibility, low down in the western sky, of a summer storm.

Joe enjoyed the afternoon thoroughly. He'd never liked John Williamson so well before; he had never had so little the sense that they belonged to two different species. They talked, for the first time, at ease, and found, within rather narrow limits, a common language.

As for old Nicholson, he proved clear treasure trove. He was wild, possibly a little mad, utterly unsound in all his scientific ideas; and his manners, though somewhat more elaborate, were as outrageous as Joe's own. But he was a perfectly real unaffected person, happily living a life that was just about as he wanted it, and as sublimely indifferent to collective opinion as he was to the facts of physics and chemistry.

He and Joe, as they tramped out to the flax fields and back to the "laboratories," and as they sat in his veranda discussing a hospitable supply of Scotch and soda, argued and swore at each other, until, by five o'clock, they were old friends. It was about this time that John was called to the telephone. Joe took advantage of the interruption for a look at the sky.

"We're going to have a hell of a big rain before night," he remarked.

Old Nicholson nodded. "I could have told you that this morning, when you telephoned, only you wouldn't have believed me. For that matter, I could have told you a week ago. Got it written down in my almanac, if you want to look. I've got a weather bureau of my own, out here, that makes those meteorological experts the government pays good money to, look foolish."

Joe would have asked for a look at the almanac (it ought to be an amusing thing to see) if Williamson hadn't come back, just then, with something else to talk about. It was Violet who had telephoned. Dorothy had driven her out to Hickory Hill—this was Graham Stannard's and Rush Wollaston's farm—and, with the storm coming up,

she didn't care to let the girl drive back. The Nicholson place was only three or four miles away, and Violet's idea was that John should pick them up at Hickory Hill and drive them home. "I told them," John concluded, "that we'd come out in your car, but that I didn't think you'd mind taking me over there, and perhaps take Violet home in my place. That little roadster of Dodo's would be a tight fit for three. It's taking you a lot out of your way, of course."

The request pleased Joe. It was of a piece with the more companionable feeling he'd been aware of between them all the afternoon. He would be late for dinner—and he'd been punctual as a commuter since Trix had been promoted to the head of his household,—but he'd contrive to telephone from somewhere and let her know what to expect.

They left Nicholson's at once, but the stop at Hickory Hill used up a good deal more time than they'd counted upon. They were an attractive lot of people, there, with whom it was easy to linger and chat;—Miss Wollaston, whom Joe had already met at the Cravens'; her brother, John, convalescing from his desperate illness of the spring; the two boys, and, utterly in her element, young Sylvia. They had an amusing house which Joe had to be shown over. Then there were chains to be put on the cars, and the vigorous discussions of what would be the best road, in view of the now imminent storm. No road was good all the way, and most of the detours would be tricky in bad weather.

It amused Joe to note that there never was the slightest question in John's mind as to how their party of four should be divided up. John, and nobody else, was going to drive his precious Dorothy over those tricky detours. Violet, he believed from a gleam he caught in her eye, was somewhat dryly aware of the same thing.

Joe, with Violet, started out ahead; but the position was reversed as soon as it began to rain, for he pulled out to the side of the road at once and began putting up the

storm curtains, and the others came on by, passing with a derisive honk from John and a shouted comment, only half audible, from Dorothy. Her idea seemed to be that the storm wasn't going to amount to anything, and that the rain felt good anyway.

"They'll go on like that till they're soaked," Violet said discontentedly, "and then they'll put up the curtains to keep the wetness in. I'm like a cat about getting wet," she added. "I hate it."

Joe's car had a right-hand drive, and his lever, especially with the hand-brake set and the storm curtains up, barred his entrance to the driving seat. It was raining in good earnest before he'd finished with the curtains, and, in the light of that last remark of hers, he hesitated to ask her to get out so that he could get in.

"I can climb in over you," he suggested, "if you don't mind being squeezed a bit."

"I don't mind," she said, and he clambered in, over her knees. Then he reached across her and buttoned the last curtain fast.

"You're wet already," she remarked, laying her hand upon his sleeve.

He told her it was nothing, but that, if she'd let him, he'd take off his coat. She nodded, and helped him extricate his arms from the sleeves. He chuck ed the wet coat into a little boot behind the seat, released his brake, and drove on.

The state of his mind and feeling toward her, when they had started out from Hickory Hill, would have satisfied the most exacting husband in the world. John Williamson, had he possessed the clairvoyant power to read it, would probably have smiled over it as not quite credibly austere. No human male of virile years could be expected to set out upon a long drive with as pretty a woman as Violet for his sole companion without a little more disposition to improve the shining hour—oh, in a perfectly harmless decent way, of course—than could be read in Joe's intentions.

Her sensuous appeal to him was completely in abeyance. She was John Williamson's wife, and John was, after all, a thoroughly good fellow. She was also, in a way he'd never been lucky enough to experience before, willing to make friends with him. He wanted her for a friend, on Trix's account as well as on his own. And then, last and first and all the time, he was that newly discovered being, Trix's father. Emotions awakened on the night of his quarrel with her hadn't had time to subside into commonplace tepidity. The chance that Trix's father should even glance aside at the amorous possibilities of another woman would have been unthinkable to him—when he left Hickory Hill. But when he started the car, after that pause to put the curtains up, there had been a change.

The subtlety of the sense perceptions, when they are trained and relied upon, as Joe's were, is beyond language, altogether. It was with perfect innocence that he suggested it mightn't be necessary for her to get out of the car in order to let him in, if she didn't mind being squeezed a bit. But some quality of her voice when she answered, "I don't mind," roused him. She had inflected it in a thoroughly matter-of-fact way, too. There was the same message in the feel of her body as he crowded across it, in the non-withdrawal of her breast from contact with his arm as he buttoned the curtains, in her discovery of the wetness of his coat and in the way she helped him out of it. A series of acts which could have been described in precisely the same words, might have told him nothing at all, might have left him as coolly unconscious of her sex as he'd been when he stopped the car. There wasn't the faintest doubt in him of the authenticity of the message. Whether she'd meant to convey it, or even was aware she had, he couldn't feel sure.

He called up a sullen resistance to meet it. He drove briskly and hard through the pounding rain. His left hand was kept busy sweeping the windshield clear with the squeeze, and every time his arm came back to the driving position, it had to crowd its way in beside her,

body. There was nothing tender about the way he did it. He talked, doggedly, dully, about old Nicholson and his flax and his mad ideas. He talked about the Wollastons and the success John's wife was making at Ravinia. Anything that would press back his consciousness—and his awareness of hers—that they were shut in together snug and close against the storm, alone and secure; of their bodily warmth, the nearness of flesh to flesh.

She did nothing to help him. She said little, made no conversation of her own. And what she did say was no longer friendly, but curt, preoccupied. Well, he knew—he knew too damned well—what her preoccupation was.

He gave over trying to talk at last, and drove all the harder. He could feel his heart pounding like a sulky motor. The rain had increased to a cloud-burst. It looked like a solid wall of water he was driving into. There was only a lurid dusk of daylight left and the two misty pencils from his head-lights illuminated nothing.

"I suppose it's dangerous to go on through this," she remarked indifferently.

"It'd be a damn sight more dangerous to stop," he growled and didn't know whether she had heard or not. She gave no sign, anyhow, that he could hear or feel, and he didn't turn to look.

But within a minute or two the question of going on was settled for him. He had been balancing the car on the crown of a newly worked dirt road. It was a trick comparable to walking a tight-rope, and when a loose stone threw him a little to one side the car instantly became unsteerable. He killed the motor and with the clutch in, braked as hard as he dared, which wasn't much, to check their momentum, but there was no way to stop their side-slip. The only question was whether they would bring up in a ditch, in which case the car would no doubt roll over, or against a cut-down bank. It depended on which was there.

Violet laughed as she felt them going, but not, he noted, the sort of laugh one might expect. There was nothing

of panic in it. It was only a matter of seconds before they brought up against the bank and stopped with a jolt which threw her violently upon him.

For a moment, her body was like steel, every muscle stretched taut; but even so she made no movement away from him. He eased the position of his shoulder, by slipping it under her, and at that, with a gasp, she went soft. His arm closed round her and held her where she was.

"You're a good sport," he told her hoarsely. "There's no telling where you're going to bring up when you start a side-slip like that."

Her answer was hardly articulate. "--been slipping a long while--" was what he thought he heard.

He felt an imperious need to see her face, and reaching out with his free hand he switched on the dash lamp. She flinched at the faint glow but made no spoken protest. The little light made the outer darkness deeper. The rain shut them in like a many folded curtain. "Oh, God!" he whispered helplessly. Then, with a laugh, "I guess there's nothing we can do about it."

"Not a thing," she murmured.

He pulled her up higher so that her head fell back upon his shoulder, and kissed her up-turned mouth, hotly, unequivocally. Then he drew back and stared down into her face.

Her eyes, wide open, luminous, returned his gaze with something in them that confounded him;—an impossible thing. Innocence! The incredulous half-terrified awakening of a new surmise! She was a mother of a grown girl. She had been married the better part of twenty years. But she made him think of Beatrice.

He shifted her over to her own side of the seat, gently enough but with a movement of sudden resolution; then he clenched his hands on the wheel. "We can't go on with this," he said, holding his voice as steady as he could. "It isn't easy to pull up, but it can be done."

He didn't look at her; gazed out fixedly through the windshield as if he'd been driving the car. But he was

aware of her, slumped down a little in her seat and shuddering. She gave no indication of listening to him, but he plunged heavily on, in spurts. The mess had got to be cleared up somehow, now, before it grew any worse.

"That's the way we feel about each other all right; there's no getting away from that. Have from the first, I guess. . . . But it isn't the only way,—not with me anyhow. . . . It's nobody's fault this happened. Just bad luck. And there's no harm done, yet. . . . It's a string we can't play out, that's all. We don't want to play it out. You don't want to make a fool of your husband, and neither do I. And I do want to be friends with you—the other way. I want you for a friend, for Beatrice. And this would spoil all that. We can't have it both ways. And we can't go half-way and stop. It's got to be all or nothing—with us.—I'm not saying it's easy." His voice rose and his grip on the wheel tightened. "It's a hell of a thing—the way it—jumps on you, out of the bushes. But it's not the only thing in the world."

She turned upon him, now, and the movement brought his eyes round to her for the first time since he'd begun speaking. She was still trembling, and her eyes were bright, but with a furious anger. "Oh, you're—unspeakable!" she cried.

"For telling the truth?"

"The truth!" Rage made her almost voiceless. "I wouldn't have listened as long as I did if I'd understood what you meant. The beastly thing you meant."

"We meant the same thing, for a minute or two," he told her bluntly. "It shocked you to realize it. Well, it shocked me, too,—though you may not believe it. And I thought the only way for us to get back on the other basis—as friends . . ."

Frantically, she snatched the word away from him. "Friends? With you? After the—*beastly* things you've done—and said?"

"It's the saying that's the crime," he commented grimly. "What we did wouldn't have mattered, to you, I guess,

if we'd pretended it was nothing.—*Aren't you any realer than that?"*

"If you speak to me again," she declared wildly, "I'll get out of the car. I'll wade in the mud till I find somebody who'll come back and . . ." She shrank away from him, leaving the threat to be guessed at, buried her face in her hands and began crying, like a child.

He clenched the wheel, fighting down the impulse to take her up in his arms again. He knew what would happen if he did. She'd struggle for a minute, and then go soft again—and they'd be back where they were before. The old Adam in him was grinning at him for a fool to have taken her so seriously. Even a prudential consideration whispered that she'd be less dangerous—less troublesome, anyhow; she couldn't be dangerous—so dealt with, than as now. But he sat still and the wave passed, leaving him cool, unmoved, as if the storm had never been.

Outside, the storm was, he finally decided, thinning. He looked cautiously round at Violet. She'd about stopped crying, too, though her face was still buried in her hands. "If you'll let me out," he said, "I'll see what can be done about getting started, again."

She stepped down into the road without a word or a glance at him. When he came back, twenty minutes later, with some boards he'd found, she was at first nowhere to be seen, but presently he made her out by the faint daylight that was returning as the sky cleared, up on the bank a little distance away, looking down the road. He gave no sign of having seen her, but when he went to work jacking up the wheels and sliding the boards under them she came down and asked him, composedly enough, if he needed her help. She remained near by, just the same, when he told her he did not, and even volunteered a remark about the weather. She asked to have the curtains taken off before they started on again, and a something peremptory in her voice when she said it was all that slanted in any way toward what had happened between them. She

took her place beside him with no appearance of hesitation.

They had a wild mile or two slithering over those inclined planes of clay which made what was supposed to be a road. Repeatedly they began sliding toward one of the ditches or the other, and it wanted all his skill and sometimes most of his strength to avoid disaster. She said very little but she showed a perfectly normal concern for his success, and by the time they were safely upon gravel again he felt that she was, in balance and tone, much the same person with whom he'd left Hickory Hill. But of her intentions toward him, the sort of *modus vivendi*, if any, she meant to offer him, he had no inkling whatever.

He was conscious of a growing intangibility about her as she became more at ease. Indeed, it struck him, amusedly, at something she said, that she'd have said just that thing, and in just that tone, to Jeffrey, her chauffeur. But his last impression of her that day was to be of a different sort.

They had slowed down for a right-angle turn in the road when simultaneously they saw the other car, standing in a drive that led up to a big comfortable-looking farm-house. Joe stopped at once, and began backing to turn in.

"You needn't do that," she said sharply. "I can get out right here." She added, when he went on without obeying her, "I've already been in the mud, so it's too late for that."

She was fumbling with the door-handle so, instead of cutting forward, he went on backing the car, across the culvert and up the drive. He made her no other answer until she demanded furiously, "Why don't you do as I say?—What are you going to do?"

"I don't even know your husband's in that house. I suppose he is. But I'm not going to leave you till I can turn you over to him—as good as I got you."

Again he saw she was trembling violently. "You—cad!" she whispered.

"I'm not going to tell him anything," he said. "I'm going to let him have a good look at me, that's all."

By now, he had stopped his car before the door. She sprang down and fled up the path to the door-step, but he followed, only a pace behind. At the door, she turned and spoke to him in the high, clear, cultivated, leisurely tone which connotes security and place and unlimited assurance. "I'm *terribly* sorry you don't think you can stop, but I know how frightfully late I've made you,—already. Good-by."

But her face made of that manner a pitiable travesty. She was on the verge of the complete demoralization of panic. She couldn't endure seeing her husband and her daughter in the same room with him. Not to-day at any rate. There was clear hatred of him in her eyes but there was appeal, as well, and this he couldn't resist.

He turned sharply away and was getting into his car when John Williamson opened the door. He waved one hand while he slid his transmission lever into first speed with the other. A moment more and he was driving as fast as he could back to town—and Beatrice. He didn't care a damn what John or any of the rest of that gang thought of him.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SAMARITANS

1

FOR Henry Craven, after he and Novelli had put his sister and Portia on the Boston train, there began at once a life of guilty pleasure. It was guilty only in that it was pleasurable. He ought to have missed Margaret, of course, suddenly deprived of the care she'd always lavished upon him, and he was perfectly aware of this moral obligation. Margaret, in fact, had pointed it out—indirectly, by referring to herself as a good riddance and laughing at his protest that he shouldn't know how to get on without her. But, unnatural as it was to feel this way, he liked being left alone—"let alone" he stopped on the brink of putting it. There was no disguising the throb of elation he felt at the end of the day's work with the realization that he needn't go home—nor even telephone to explain why.

Usually he did go home, after picking up a bite to eat on the way, but this, too, was fun of a sort. If it was a hot night, he'd undress, leaving his clothes about just as he liked, and get into pajamas, and then sit down at the piano and read a score (his piano technique was so sketchy that this diversion always got on Margaret's nerves, when she was about; she couldn't, either, see why, if he felt like music, he didn't practise on his violin, an instrument he could play) or a detective story in an easy chair. He became aware of a lack, somewhere, about this, and finally supplied it by the purchase of an expensive English pipe and some tobacco Hugh Corbett recommended.

He didn't like the taste of it, exactly, but the connotative sensations were immensely satisfactory.

When the bill at Ravinia attracted him he'd go directly to the Park from down-town, without bothering to dress, get his dinner in the casino, and hear just as much of the opera as he liked, usually without committing himself to a seat in the pavilion. Sometimes he'd find Mary Wollaston (she was keeping house for Paula that summer) and go for a stroll with her about the lawns. And if, after spending the intermission in pleasant gossip with her, he decided he didn't want to hear any more music that night, he simply took the next car back to town without an explanatory word to anybody. He hadn't known an irresponsibility like this since his father's death, sixteen years ago—half his lifetime, almost.

One night the intoxication of liberty led him more widely astray, to a place known as the Blue Moon Garden. He didn't know just what sort of place it was, but if the respectability of some of the persons he knew to be its occasional patrons was a criterion, it couldn't be, exactly, disreputable. He was sure he'd heard the Bob Corbets and Eleanor Randolph speak of going there. They were advertising a new *revue* at the place, and when Henry read James Wallace's comment in his paper, to the effect that the music was less painful than most of the jazz one heard nowadays, and that, though sumptuously undressed, the show was not vulgar and rather smart, it surprisingly struck him that it would be fun to go and see what an entertainment of this sort was like. Even so, he'd hardly have overcome a countervailing reluctance if it had not occurred to him to ask himself what this reluctance sprang from. It was not, he decided, from a real distaste. He'd caught himself wishing that Joe Greer were back in town from the North and would ask him to go; Joe, who knew the ropes and would see him through if anything happened. But what possibly could happen? The trouble with him was that he was afraid! That settled the question, of course. He'd have to go.

He felt absurd over his fears after he'd got inside. The place was nothing but what would have been called a beer-garden before the days of prohibition. A band shell, a dancing floor with rows of tables round it rising in terraces, and at one side a rudimentary and imperfectly isolated stage, a few scraggy limes surviving the strangulation of the wooden platforms that had been built round their trunks, and a wild medley of colored incandescent lamps in meaningless festoons. Henry gratefully accepted the head-waiter's consignment of him to an inconspicuous table in a corner and ordered ginger-ale as the least unpleasant of the drinks that were lawfully left to him.

He seriously contemplated walking out of the place again before the show began, for the tone of the crowd offended him. He disliked their voices and their table manners and especially he disliked the way they danced. The floor was as yet only half filled, but the couples upon it, plastered as tight together as mutually embracing arms could hold, made almost no lateral motion beyond a languid circling, and the stammering drunken rhythm of the music expressed itself in the twitching of shoulders and the writhing of hips.

This wasn't so very different, he was aware, from the way young people danced at the parties Dorothy went to, but—well, if Dorothy danced like that she wouldn't do it that way. Nothing she did could be ugly or vile, as the movements, for example, of that little rag of a girl in black, with the long feather, were ugly and vile. Did he mean to pretend that well-bred people could do, without offense, the same things that were indecent when vulgar folk did them? Yes, he guessed that was exactly what he meant.

It was an immense relief to him when the noise of the jazz players was stilled, the floor cleared and the show begun. It needed, no doubt, all the advantage it got from comparison with its audience to make it seem smart and well-behaved, and, as the evening advanced, this con-

trast was less enforced. The entertainment percolated from the dance floor, whence it had flowed from the stage, among the tables, and during the long intermissions he recognized performers sitting at the tables and dancing with the spectators.

About ten o'clock, a girl, one of the principal performers it appeared from the way the music and the lights were employed to dramatize her entrance, sang a song upon the familiar theme of a quest for a lover. The idea was made plain that any one possessing certain elemental qualifications would do and it was packed with innuendo which delighted the audience. After she had sung a verse from the stage she moved down among the tables, stopping here and there to make her plea to such individuals as would be most embarrassed by it.

Until she came into Henry's neighborhood, he didn't recognize her at all, for she was extravagantly made up as the familiar vampire type and, too, he'd avoided looking at her very closely from a fear of attracting her eye. But when he perceived by the direction of stares from the near-by tables that she was actually bearing down upon him, he looked up in desperation—and realized that he knew her. She was one of the two girls who had come home from Twitchell's show with Joe Greer; not the French girl he'd liked so well, but the other one. What was her name? Bunny—something.

In the same instant she recognized him and relinquished her intention, transfixing, in his stead, a victim at the next table. But he was sure that as she passed, close enough to brush his sleeve, she'd spoken to him, to the effect, he thought, that she'd see him later. He found her name in his program and made sure he'd not been mistaken. Yes, there it was in big black letters, Bunny Barrett.

Certainly he wouldn't go and look her up at the end of the performance if this was what she'd meant—but was it? Wouldn't it be more sensible to slip away at once? He'd had enough of this, hadn't he? Yes, of course. All the

same he didn't go. Probably she'd meant nothing at all by that aside of hers, if, indeed, he hadn't mistaken her, altogether.

So he was still sitting there, a bit uneasy but mysteriously excited, when, early in the next intermission, he saw her coming toward him again, decorously cloaked, now, in a light evening wrap and with some of the more flagrant items of her make-up removed, but unmistakable, nevertheless, to the occupants of the tables, who stared after her with open curiosity. It was too late then, of course, for Henry to do anything but get up and shake hands and ask her to sit down with him. Fortified by his program he was able to address her as Miss Barrett.

The officious proximity of a waiter suggested an offer of refreshment, which he, a little hesitantly, made. "I come on again," she said, "so I haven't time to eat anything, but I would like a glass of Munich beer." He thought this was facetious and began, "So would I . . ." when he perceived she'd said it seriously. "You can get anything if they know you," she assured him, and, turning, informed the waiter that he was all right. "*Absolutely!*" So Henry, feeling superbly wicked, said he'd take Munich beer, too. A half litre for each of them.

Conversation with Bunny didn't flow freely, even under the liquefactive influence of the beer. She asked about Joe and learned he was out-of-town. She revived memories of their party and regretted that the real one, to which he was to have brought his violin, hadn't come off. Henry made what he could of these infertile topics but it was not much, and he had no others to launch in place of them. Yet, preposterously, he was enjoying the adventure. He basked in the respectful envy of the tables round about, in his status as a trustworthy lawbreaker, established by Bunny's guarantee, with the waiter. She'd transfigured him—this was what, in a word, it came to—into a personage!

But before she left him his complacence was destined to collapse. He was looking out over the dance floor hope-

ful of seeing something which might be made to serve as conversational grist, when his glance fell upon Joe's daughter, Beatrice. Evidently she had just come in, for the head-waiter was conducting her and her companion to a reserved table. Henry knew him, too. He was young Lansing Ware. Their progress attracted a good deal of attention, the girl's prettiness, her swagger and her conspicuous dress (it was an evening frock of rose or strawberry color, matched, more or less, in stockings, slippers and an explosive hat) making this inevitable. Henry was disconcerted, on turning back to Bunny, to find her watching them with an interest evidently as personal as his.

"Quite some baby, Lance has pronged out to-night!" she observed, adding with a sniff, "—And then people talk about actresses!" She seemed quite sure that Beatrice did not belong to her profession.

"Do you know him?" he asked.

Bunny nodded. "He's a cold storage egg, all right," she said. Her tone was as derogatory as the unusual epithet she had applied to him, but it struck Henry, from the way she changed her position and kept looking at the egg, that she'd be glad to attract his attention. The table they'd taken wasn't far away and she might easily manage it.

The mere glimpse of the corollary possibility, that Beatrice and young Ware would see him, in his present company, reduced him to a state of acute embarrassment. He was ashamed of the feeling but this didn't help him to overcome it. He sat as small as he could and fixed his eyes upon the food-stained bill of fare upon the table. Another dance began presently and he was able to dismiss, for the moment, his fears (though not his disgust with himself for having entertained them) by observing that the other couple had merged themselves into the milling mass of dancers upon the floor. Also, it appeared, this dance was Bunny's call to quarters.

. She said as she took leave of him that she'd be free again a little after eleven, but he assured her that he was

leaving almost at once. It was terribly nice of her to have remembered him, and he hoped that they might meet again some time. "The head-waiter'll send a note back any time you come," she told him, and upon his fervid promise to write such a note—the next time he came back to the Blue Moon—she left him. She was a nice, friendly, hard-working girl and he was a pitiful snob to have been ashamed of her merely because two people he knew happened to come into the garden, but bootless contrition wasn't the thing the moment called for. He must make up his mind what to do about Beatrice.

Lansing Ware was, unless the gossip of his own circle did him grave injustice, a pretty bad lot. Bunny's simile had really been charitable. He'd been court-martialed for drunkenness, Henry had been told, and his limp was not an honorable wound, but the result of a joy-riding escapade of an unusually discreditable sort. The real indictment against him, however, seemed to be that he elaborated and encouraged the myth among all persons to whom the truth could not be told, beginning with his devoted mother and sister, that he'd been disabled in the strikingly courageous performance of duty. It was not a disability that interfered with any of his pleasures, so far as one could see. He might not have been able to dance the waltz of Henry's day, but at what they called dancing here, to-night, he seemed adept.

Henry's impulse, as soon as Bunny's departure set him at liberty, was to attach himself to the couple, if only as a barnacle, discourage young Ware, if possible amuse Beatrice, and eventually take her home. But it wasn't his way, after all those years of Margaret's training, to do anything impulsively, even when his inclination was clear—and in this case it was not.

He liked the girl, a little, and what he didn't like about her he whole-heartedly pitied. Yet he was aware that his pity would be resented and the grounds for it inexplicable to her. He had thought he found in her, at the beginning of their acquaintance, the germ of a genuine liking

for him, an evanescent lighting up and opening out to him which wasn't at all a matter of consciously presented appearances;—but very likely he'd been mistaken in this.

Margaret thought so, anyhow. She'd cut him short with a satirical smile, during his only talk with her upon the subject, and had told him bluntly that the girl was only—to use her own vocabulary—stringing him. "She was smiling over your shoulder at her father whenever she got a chance.—And I understand she boasted of you as a conquest, to Dorothy." Margaret took some of the sting out of this by adding the general truth that any girl of that age could make a fool of any man over thirty-five.

She was probably right, even in this special case. Women were a lot less credulous than men;—saw things clearer. And he'd felt, for himself, about some of Beatrice's professions and approaches, a naive coquetry. Anyhow he was pretty sure that if he attached himself to her to-night he'd be received, not as a friend but as a rival of Lansing Ware, who would be made, perhaps, the recipient of surreptitious smiling glances of commiseration. It would be a thoroughly unpleasant position—as that of an ineffectual altruist usually was.

It was the ineffectuality rather than the unpleasantness that held him back. He didn't dance, these days. (His hatred of the new rhythms was too intense even for Margaret to overcome.) All he could do would be to sit at their table and trust their charity to bring them back to it. He thought, too late, of an audacious strategic resource he'd thrown away,—Bunny! With her enlisted help, he might have accomplished something. But he acknowledged, with disgust, that his courage wouldn't have been equal to this, even if he'd thought of it in time, and in this reaction he unobtrusively left the garden and went home to bed.

Very likely this mountain he'd been making was nothing but a molehill, after all. Young girls of unimpeachable social position did frequent places of this sort, or worse, if one believed the gossip, in no more protective company

than that of boys of their own years and class. They deserted respectable dinners and dances their parents had consigned them to, and adventured abroad, in the small hours, carrying their liquor with them. Yet Henry believed they emerged from this phase of quasi-libertinage, shabby as it was, more or less intact. Then why worry about Beatrice?

Well, Beatrice's social position wasn't unimpeachable. She hadn't the protection of the pale. During these weeks of her father's absence, she lacked even the protection of a home. She was mistress of a flat—an atrocious position for a girl to have been abandoned in. Henry wondered why Joe had done it. He had never understood why the plan for sending her east with Margaret had so suddenly been dropped.

Margaret, he was aware, had been deeply offended by the change, and he suspected, from an enigmatic phrase or two she'd used, that Joe was not the sole object of her anger; but she had repulsed so fiercely his own innocently meant questions, that he'd been glad to let the subject alone. There was no doubt, however, that she'd washed her hands of both the Greers before she went away. She'd been, indeed, unusually—explicit about it. It had been on this occasion that she'd spoken her mind to her brother about the nature of Beatrice's regard for him.

It was painfully clear to Henry that she'd be annoyed to be told—and of course he'd have to tell her—that he had attempted anything in the nature of a rescue.—Of Dulcinea del Toboso! That would be Margaret's view of it, and with, he couldn't deny, a certain justification. He would feel foolish, paraded in the guise of captive at the chariot-tail of the young thing he'd seen to-night in Lansing Ware's embrace! Yet something had got to be done about it.

A telephoned reminder from Violet that he hadn't been near them since Margaret went away and a specific invitation to come up to an early dinner and go to the Park afterward to hear Fournier sing in *Thais*, showed him, he

thought, a way to making a truce with his conscience. Violet was the person, of course, to give Beatrice the tactful looking-after she needed. She'd quite made friends with Joe. There was, in the back of his head, a faint surmise that some suggestion of hers, inadvertent, no doubt, was responsible for Joe's having given up his idea of sending Beatrice east for the summer. She might easily enough have said, without meaning as much as he'd supposed, that she'd keep a friendly eye on the girl. The simplest way to fulfill the promise would be for Violet to invite her to stay with them until her father's return.

He found everything auspicious, beyond his hopes, for the unfolding of this project. Another pair of guests hadn't been able to come, Dodo was off somewhere, so the bare three of them, Violet and John and Henry, sat down to dine together. She struck him, too, as unusually amiable, to-night, affectionate with him as she'd only rarely been since the distant days—among the Chateaux—of their youthful romance.

She kept the reins of the talk, though, in her own hands. She was full of enthusiasm over the summer opera, the amazingly high quality of the performances, the fun it all was. She'd been going quite a lot to rehearsals, lately. You never really understood an opera until you'd heard it rehearsed. What did Henry think of Fournier? What had he heard him in? Wasn't he the greatest of all the modern acting barytones? Oh, Baklanoff was great, of course—but this man was so delightful, personally. He'd been playing round with them quite a lot, lately. He loved shooting over the traps with John and was awfully good at it, which you wouldn't expect, somehow, of an artist like that. But it seemed he'd done it for years at Monte Carlo, using live birds, of course.

The theme showed no signs of exhausting itself as the dinner progressed so Henry, at last, to forestall her leaving him with John to their cigars, plunged into his story from a standing start. He'd had a rather uncomfortable experience, he said, and he wanted to tell them about it—

particularly Violet. He threw that in because he fancied from a restless movement of hers that she contemplated leaving them, anyhow. He brightened up his beginning as best he could by stressing his unfamiliarity with the rôle of dissolute bachelor, which had led him to visit a place like the Blue Moon. He told them, upon the same tack, about Bunny, explaining, though pretty concisely, the circumstances in which he'd formerly met her; and he felt, at once, through his skin, that this had been a mistake. It was too late to help that now, though, so he went straight on to the heart of the business.

"Well, that's the sort of place it is. I suppose you know all about it. Anyhow it was a great shock to me to see young Beatrice Greer there. Lansing Ware brought her in, just as I was on the point of leaving."

He elected to look up at John, at that, instead of at Violet. She had said nothing, nor moved, so far as he was aware, but he knew that, for some reason, his mission wasn't prospering. John mysteriously confirmed this by looking fixedly at him, lowering his off-eyelid—the one Violet couldn't see, and almost perceptibly shaking his head—a plain warning that Henry was on thin ice. However, you aren't lifted off it by the mere knowledge that it's thin.

"Oh, I suppose any one might go there," he hurried on; "even Dorothy, for a lark, with the right sort of crowd. But a girl like Beatrice, who hasn't yet had a chance to learn her way about, going alone to a resort like that with a rotter like young Ware, is in—well, real danger, it seems to me. And since you're on friendly terms with Joe . . ."

He forced himself, at this point, to look round at Violet, by way of driving it home to her that he'd used the pronoun in the singular personal sense, and the sight of her face stopped him short. It was ablaze with anger. She gave an ugly laugh and contemptuously repeated his word.

"Danger! She's past that, I guess. Her father's

daughter—if that's what she is! He was in the habit of taking his girls home with him, wasn't he? Well, that's probably what she's doing, now she's been given the chance, with Lansing Ware—and so on."

Henry, frozen speechless, was a little relieved to see that John was gathering himself up for a protest. Evidently, though, Violet perceived the same thing. Springing up and thrusting back her chair, she forestalled him. "It's his own fault," she told her husband sharply; "—mentioning Dodo in the same breath with a—thing like that!" Then she turned on Henry. "I won't have that man spoken of, so you may as well make up your mind to it. He isn't speakable. He's been bragging to you, I suppose, of the—'friendly terms' he's on with me."

It was not, in form, a question—Henry had neither voice nor wits to have dealt with it if it had been—but he got the impression that she awaited, breathless for a moment, an answer. When she saw he meant to make none, the tension slackened and she gave him a dry little smile. "You're the one John and I are worrying about," she said, and with a nod and a matter-of-fact admonition not to smoke too long, as they didn't want to be late for the first act, she left them.

"It'll be 'business as usual' with Greer, from now on," John explained, at the end of a long thick silence, punctuated by a sigh and a heart-felt damn or two, "but as a social account he's written off the books. And the girl, too, of course. Sort of a pity, because she isn't so bad, but there's nothing else to do."

"Something happened, I suppose," Henry ventured weakly.

John nodded. "I don't know what, exactly. Violet swears it was nothing—that had to be taken up, you know. Why, we were all driving back from Hickory Hill—oh, a couple of weeks ago, this was, the day we had that cloud-burst—and I'd put her in with him. I was driving Dodo in the little roadster. When they came up with us, at the house we'd taken shelter in, she left him and fin-

ished the drive with Dodo and me. Tried to make out it was nothing but that she didn't want to take him so far out of his way. But I could see she'd been badly shaken up. Some rotten thing he'd said to her, I suppose. Of course she doesn't want a mess made of it, so the only thing to do is to let it alone. I could kick myself for having given him a chance even to look at her, because, of course, I knew he was a damned mucker, from the first. But he seemed to act all right, at the start. I almost liked him that day we went to Hickory Hill. And all the while, I suppose, he was just waiting for his chance."

It was fortunate, Henry felt, for him, that John wasn't watching him very closely, and that his responsive indignation over the story of Joe's misbehavior was taken so confidently for granted. He stubbornly—and to himself, surprisingly—disbelieved that Joe had been waiting for his chance or that he'd made an unwarranted use of it. The thing that stood out in his mind was Violet's look while she waited to learn whether Joe had told him his version of the episode and her evident relief when she came to the conclusion that he had not. Henry had been observing her for many years with a pretty well disillusioned eye, and he had memories of his own which served as interpreters. Violet might have got more than she bargained for, but she had not been the victim of an unprovoked assault. And if there'd been anything she could tell John, she'd have told it.—But these reflections were clearly not presentable to John Williamson. It was hardly prudent even to entertain them in his presence.

"You said something about business as usual," Henry reminded him. "I suppose that applies to me."

John assured him that it did. He added, rather more thoughtfully, "And even on the personal side, as far as you're concerned, I wouldn't make any difference, if I were you—for the present. We can't possibly get rid of him for another year, and there's no good stirring him up, unnecessarily, or making him suspicious. In some ways,

the better he likes you, the—simpler the situation will be. You've done well with him, so far. Better than I thought you could. Well, keep it up. Don't worry about Violet. I'll square you with her.—It's damned unlucky, on that side, that this thing had to break the way it did. No help for it, of course.—I don't suppose there's any chance, even now, of getting Margaret to take the girl?"

"I'm afraid that can't be managed," Henry said, more decisively than he often spoke.

John, though, seemed quite unaware of this, and went on, comfortably, "Oh, well, do the best you can to keep him on the rails. That's really important, you know."

Anger was a rare and slowly roused emotion with Henry, but it burned in him like a fever, as he sat in Violet's box that evening, pretending to listen to the inanities of *Thais*, so hot that he wondered they didn't ask what was the matter with him. Complacently, they saw nothing. Violet was absorbed in her new pet, the barytone, Fournier—a safer sort, for the rôle of tame cat she evidently thought him, than Joe had turned out to be. And John—what was the matter of his contented contemplations? His patent importance; his possessions—including the most highly valued of them, his pretty wife; his profits, past and future—including those he meant to make out of Joe Greer's genius, before he got rid of him?

John was the unconscious object of the hottest of Henry's wrath. The hardly veiled implications in that talk of theirs, burned under his skin like a corrosive. He understood, now, the true nature of the job John had so benevolently offered him last April. A spy, expected to insinuate his way into the confidence of a business associate, quiet his suspicions, "keep him on the rails," against the day of his precalculated destruction. Well, Henry would see them damned first, and he'd go to John, upon a fitting occasion—naturally not here in the box, to-night,—and tell him so.

At the intermission he pleaded a headache, which something about his looks seemed to make plausible to Violet,

and took the next trolley back to town; but the change of scene did not effect a recession of his anger. It kept him half awake till dawn, like a recurrent nightmare.

He'd have to resign his job with the flax company. It was not, under his present instructions, the sort of job a man with any self-respect could hold. Not if he'd understood those instructions aright. Well, there couldn't be any serious doubt—could there?—that he had. He'd say that to John in so many words. They could find some one else, no doubt. He'd go back to his old job in the bank. But would they take him back? No, they wouldn't. The ranks, there, had closed up behind him.

He realized with a sensation of spiritual nausea, that a quarrel to the finish with John was, simply, not open to him. Not with Margaret . . . No, it wasn't Margaret. He couldn't hide behind her. She'd be looked after, no doubt, kept safely on the hither side of actual privation, anyhow, no matter what he did. But there'd be no mercy shown him, once he had openly presented himself to John in the colors of an ingrate and renegade. Life, in the limbo John and his friends could consign him to, was a thing he couldn't face.

In the morning, though, after he'd shaved and had his breakfast, he was able to take a less cheerless, as well as a less drastic, view of the situation. He couldn't be considered a spy upon Joe, because his position was openly acknowledged. He was there to protect the legitimate interests of a certain group of stock-holders, and there was no reason why he should not go on protecting them. His personal sentiments toward Joe were irrelevant. There was no need of insisting to John that his friendship for the man was genuine and not simulated. John's assumption that it was simulated was really, though unpalatable, about the best lubricant the situation could have. He had, for example, given a *carte blanche* which fully licensed Henry's new-born project for constituting himself an uncle to Beatrice.

But at the end of a fortnight in the course of which he

had made four or five attempts to get himself established in the girl's mind as a friendly anchorage, he confessed himself defeated. Jennie MacArthur was the person to whom the confession was made.

2

Until both Joe and Margaret went away, Henry had made little conscious progress toward a friendship with the infallible secretary. From the first they'd got on well enough. He had not, as he'd expected, found her superhuman efficiency irritating, nor himself put upon the defensive by it. After the first two or three days of routine work in the office, he blushed whenever he recalled his injurious suspicion, entertained on the day of the directors' meeting, that there might be a sexual liaison between her and Joe. By the end of the first week he had forgotten that he'd ever entertained it. He found she'd meant literally her invitation to call on her any time for anything in the whole range of the activities of the new and rather chaotic business, and his dependence upon her was a little humiliating until, along in June, she was out a fortnight with an attack of flu, and he found that every one else missed her just as he did. But that she had any existence out of office hours hadn't occurred to him.

In the office, however, it wasn't all business—a discovery which had delighted Henry after his long years of habituation to the cold inelastic routine of the bank. This atmosphere, by contrast, seemed almost frivolous. Work always got done, to be sure, but there was no prescribed manner, no look of solemn preoccupied importance to be maintained, and if there was nothing to do, you did nothing, openly and unabashed. Oftener than not it happened during some chink in the day that Henry would find himself with Miss MacArthur and Joe, sitting in one of their offices very much at ease, chatting about amusing matters that had nothing remotely to do with the flax business or any other.

Joe was chiefly responsible for these recesses and,

naturally, was the focus of them, talking most of the time himself, but Jennie contributed something indispensable to them, a sort of warm luminous atmosphere like the aura her hair made when you saw her against the light. This same gracious atmosphere enveloped Henry's momentary encounters with her in the course of the day's work.

It was nothing she consciously generated, nor that Henry was specifically aware of, but when it occurred to him, one day, that not once since he had stepped into this new birth had his old hounding fear of losing his job assailed him, he decided that Jennie had had a lot to do with this immunity;—more, even, than Joe. She could so easily have made him feel useless and inept, especially if she'd set out to be helpful and encouraging.

Joe's absence in the North threw them, of course, into a much closer association than there'd been any need of before, and revealed, to Henry, unsuspected qualities in her. Her suppleness and her abundance in resource he'd always perceived, but he found in her now a penetration, an ability to think through, with which he'd never credited her.

He thought about her a lot, even during his leisurely meditations away from the office, but even so it was as a detached phenomenon which materialized when she left her little car over in Grant Park in the morning and dematerialized again when she went to get it at night. When, with the wearing off of the novelty of doing without Margaret, he began casting about for companions for occasional evenings, Jennie presented herself at first to his mind as a pleasant but, somehow, fanciful possibility; he played for several days with the notion of inviting her out to dinner or to a show without getting any nearer to the point of doing it. It might, he feared, strike her as a little absurd.

But when, in his deepening perplexity about Beatrice, he thought of Jennie as a helpful counselor, he seized upon this as an excuse, walked straight into her office with it, and asked her if she'd dine with him that night; “—or

any night within the next few days when you happen to be free. There's something I'd like to talk over with you," he added a little hurriedly, "and the office doesn't strike me as just the place for it."

She did smile, in open amusement, over his explanation, but her comment saved him from feeling that he'd been laughed at. "That's like Joe," she said. "Yes, I'll be glad to come. To-night's all right, for me." She asked, after he'd brought up the question of the hour and the place, "Is it anything about the business?"

He felt a little apologetic about admitting it was not, but her explanation disposed of this misgiving at once.

"If it isn't about the business, I'd like to go home and dress, first. So it won't be quite so much a business woman's advice you'll get.—That's what I say," she added, "but I suppose the real reason is that I like an excuse for pretending it's a party."

"It is a party, really," he confessed. "The advice was my excuse. I felt I needed one, somehow." So they decided amicably upon the Blackstone at seven o'clock. Henry went home and dressed, too,—a thing he hadn't done since Margaret went away.

He had been looking at her long enough, after he came into the hotel lobby, to think what a charming-looking woman that was and how well she was dressed before he knew her for Jennie at all; indeed, if she hadn't nodded and risen to meet him just when she did, he might have turned his gaze away and gone on with his search for her. The costume she'd put on to "make it feel like a party" was just the simple sort of thing appropriate to the warm night and the occasion they'd planned, but, bringing out, as it did, a feminine aspect of her he'd never surmised, it amounted almost to a metamorphosis. It seemed queer to hear this stranger speak in Jennie's forthright full-throated voice.

"I know musicians hate eating to music," she said, when the question of the choice of dining-rooms came up, "so we'll go into the small one, where there isn't any."

He acquiesced in the choice she had made for him, though he suspected it was not her own, and thanked her for it after they were seated at a snug little table by an open window. "I don't think I've ever had that preference recognized before," he said. "Most of my friends refuse to believe, even when I tell them, that I hate all restaurant orchestras;—the better, the worse—since I pretend to be musical.—I wonder if you'd mind telling me how you knew."

"One of my oldest friends is a musician," she told him, "Anthony March. I guess you've heard of him."

Indeed Henry had! From Paula Wollaston and others of her circle, he'd been hearing of very little else, for months. He'd heard some of his music, too. Paula had sung a cycle of Whitman songs of his, one night last spring. Amazing stuff, it was. He was greatly interested (he hoped he was concealing the fact that he was also astonished) to learn that Jennie knew the man, and he hoped she'd tell something about him.

She seemed willing enough to do this, though the narrative wasn't embroidered much. "It was through his sister, Sarah, that I got acquainted with him," she concluded, "and it's only the man, himself, I know. His music's miles above my head."

"Well, it's miles above mine, too," Henry admitted, a little to his own surprise. "He begins just about where I leave off.—I have to take my hat off to an accomplishment like his, even though, in a way, it—shows me up. To myself, I mean."

Under her intent thoughtful look, and aware of an odd sense of support he got from it, he plunged ahead with his confession. "I've, for a long time, felt rather mistreated by fortune. The only real ambition I ever had was to be a musician. Not just a musical amateur. The two things are worlds apart. But my father's death happened at an unlucky time, and cut off that possibility. At least, that's what I've always managed to make myself believe. If he had lived a few years longer, and I could

have gone on, studying . . . But when I see what a born musician like March can do, without half the chances or the help I've had, I have to admit I got all I deserve."

She demurred, reflectively, to this conclusion of his. "It isn't always easy to be sure what a person's—helps really are. Or their handicaps. Some of the things that look hard for him, to you, are just what made it easier. He hadn't anything but just himself and his music, and his music was—pretty much—all he wanted. And that made it easy for him to cut loose. But a lot of your helps must have been things you couldn't cut loose from."

In his heart he was warmly grateful to her for this defense (and how wise she was to have thought of it!), but he smiled over it, and shook his head. "No, I'm just beginning to see that you get what you really want, in this world, though it doesn't always seem so. If there'd been any music I really needed to write, I'd have written it. I'd have taken my job at the bank the way March took his piano tuning—as something to keep my sister and me alive while the main thing went on. But there wasn't anything that had to be written, in that sense. Joe told me the truth about myself, once, during the first talk we ever had. All I really asked for, he said, was a chance to look on."

A realization, involved with a memory of Margaret's dry smile, broke over him that he'd been talking steadily about himself for a long while. Jennie wasn't smiling, though, even invisibly, he was sure.

"You understand what you look on at," she remarked, "better than most people."

"Not always," he said quickly, and wondered whether he'd ever know her well enough to tell her what he'd misunderstood, in the first instance, about her and Joe. It wasn't unthinkable. He went on, "I think I do understand, well enough, the thing I wanted to talk over with you, to-night, but it's a case where understanding alone isn't much good. And what I've tried to do has amounted to little worse than nothing. It's about Beatrice Greer."

She nodded and said, "I hoped it was that. How bad do you think it is?"

He had no decisive knowledge, he hastily told her, that it was what one could fairly call "bad" at all. Only, when things had got to that stage it was too late for friendly interposition to do much good. The thing that had led him to try his hand had been a chance glimpse of her at the Blue Moon in the company of a young man his friends didn't think any too highly of. It had brought her loneliness and unprotectedness home to him and he'd been trying, in a rather futile sort of way, it seemed, to remedy these conditions. He'd been to see her two or three times, usually after telephoning and making an engagement with her, but once without this preliminary. He'd taken her out to some places of amusement, too, that he'd thought she'd like, beginning with Ravinia—which had bored her beyond concealment. Of course, he must have bored her himself, wherever they went, though she hadn't told him so.

"In fact," he remarked, "it would have been easier if she had. But she felt it necessary to treat me as a contemporary—or rather as if I regarded myself as a contemporary, and a competitor with the others—which, of course, made my whole attempt seem ridiculous. If she could have taken me as an—avuncular old duffer, who could be yawned at when she was sleepy—confided in and asked sympathy of—sent home when I was in the way,—I might have been of some use to her."

"As it was, I've never felt more futile in my life—though it's a sensation I'm pretty well accustomed to—than last Sunday afternoon. That was the time I went to see her without having telephoned first. I did it in an effort to seem friendly and informal, but it didn't work out that way. She acted pleased enough over my having come, though she seemed just a bit embarrassed by it, and when she asked me to stay for a scratch dinner with her and go for a drive afterward, I thought she really wanted me to and said I would.

"It was a mistake, of course. She'd other guests asked whom my staying seemed to make it necessary to get rid of. She was at the telephone a dozen times within the hour, getting called to it or putting calls through herself, and she'd taken me, unluckily, into the library where it wasn't possible to avoid hearing, more or less, what she said—or guessing pretty well what they were saying to her. Evidently it was a pretty rowdy gang she'd committed herself to and they were determined not to be put off. Saying things to her that she had to evade answering directly. Threatening a descent upon her in force;—jocularly, you know, but more than half in earnest. I took it, at last, that she was trying to buy them off by offering to send down to them—wherever they were—a quart of Joe's Scotch, and that even this wasn't accepted.

"I'd ignored everything up to then, but that was too much, so I told her I was sure my presence was embarrassing her and said we'd have our dinner and our ride some other time. It wasn't, I guess, a very tactful time to do it, but I tried to make her see that the last thing I wanted was to be in the way. My whole purpose in—inflicting myself upon her—I did use that word—was to be serviceable and . . . Well, I thought the purport of what I was saying was plain enough. I don't know whether she really misunderstood me or not. She's never been quite candid with me, you see. She denied, by implication, the first time I called on her, that she'd ever been to the Blue Moon, with Ware or any one else. Anyhow she pretended now to understand me as having said that I'd taken her on merely as an obligation I owed her father. She whipped herself up into such a tempest about it that I couldn't cope with her, at all, and she finished by telling me I could go and take my advice with me and not come back.—Which, of course, there was nothing for it but for me to do.—I suppose, on the whole, I've made a pretty average mess of it."

"Oh, yes," Jennie answered dispassionately. He blinked at this, whereupon she smiled at him, a smile with

no alkaline pucker of irony in it to make him feel small and inept, and added, "But you don't know, now, how it happened, exactly, nor where you missed out with her."

He said, earnestly, "If you do, I wish you'd tell me."

She took her time about beginning; lighted and smoked half an inch of a cigarette before saying a word. Finally, "I think about the only person you don't understand very well, is yourself. I mean, the way you seem to other people. You think you must look to them the way you do to yourself. Take that girl: you were so sure she must think of you as—some sort of 'old duffer.' . . . You used a funny word, there. I didn't know what it meant."

"Avuncular," he said when he saw she was waiting to be told. "It means, like an uncle."

She even made sure, before she went on, that she knew how to spell it. "Some time," she threw in, "I'll make you tell me what the word is that means like an aunt.

"Well, you were so sure she thought of you like that, that when she wouldn't treat you that way, you thought she must be pretending. It never struck you—it couldn't, I suppose—that you'd really be a wonderful person to her, with your—manners and culture, and everything, or that she'd be proud beyond anything to have you act as if you liked her. I don't believe she was bored when you took her to the opera. She was just so afraid of seeming stupid—making some ignorant break. . . . Don't you see? And if you'd pretended to think she loved it, and had asked her to go again—well, she'd have made herself think she loved it, whether she did or not, because you wanted her to. And about last Sunday: I'm sure she wanted you to stay, and was desperately anxious to get rid of her gang. Frightened stiff for fear they would come and you'd think less of her for knowing them. And when you went away, she thought that was why.—Oh, I don't expect to convince you all at once!"—this in answer to a skeptical shake of his head. "You've thought the other way too long."

"If she'd really liked me," he said, "I think she'd have

been candid with me, and she never was that. You don't lie to people you haven't a certain contempt for."

Jennie dissented vigorously from this conclusion. "People like you take frankness for granted a lot too easily. You're used to tolerance—been brought up on it. You haven't any idea how narrow-minded most people are. If you want to do anything they don't do, you have to take care they don't catch you at it. And a girl, with as much of her father in her as Beatrice has, must have found out, while she was almost a baby, that telling the truth was what usually got her into trouble. It'd be the last thing she would try with anybody she wanted the good opinion of.—She must have had a rotten bringing up, every way. I wish I might have adopted her, ten years ago or so!"

"Do it now," Henry said quickly.

She shook her head and smiled faintly. "I got off on the wrong foot with Beatrice. She got an idea about the —basis Joe and I were on, and until she's perfectly sure that that was a mistake of hers . . ." She looked up at Henry and he felt himself blushing to the hair. Her smile broadened. "I guess it must be sort of a natural thing for people to think, from the way we treat each other."

"It was a question that asked itself in my mind, the day of our first directors' meeting," he admitted. "But it had answered itself, finally, before that week was out.—I'm glad of a chance to apologize."

"As long as you answered the question yourself, without asking any one else, I don't see what you have to apologize for," she said. "I felt like apologizing to you, after Joe came into my office, that day. Anyway, it's all right.—But you can see how any advice I might give Beatrice, when she comes to me for money—it's the only time I ever see her—would go down the wrong way. She's spending a lot, but Joe told me, before he left, to let her have all she wanted, so there's nothing to do about that."

"I hope he comes back soon," Henry said at the end of a thoughtful silence; "and takes her with him when he

goes again. It's mad of him to leave her on the loose, like this."

"I don't know," Jennie reflected soberly. She was gazing down at the cloth, her elbows on the table, her chin propped upon her hands. They were very fine, beautiful hands, Henry for the first time noted. "She has to be like that, I guess. She can't be helped by shutting her in, anyway. She's too much like Joe, for that. Has to find everything out for herself, even if she gets hurt doing it. If she could only start poor, the way he did, and have to work for her life . . . She's got plenty of steam, you see, and real—courage. So I suppose she'll come out all right, in the long run. Poor old Joe's the one I'm sorry for. He's going to have a pretty bad time."

"Yes," Henry said; "I'm afraid he is." He was thinking of more than the trouble the girl would cause him;—of Violet's enmity and John's designs;—and he must have put more weight of meaning into the words than a mere agreement with Jennie would have accounted for, for she looked quickly up at him, questioningly, through a bright moisture of tears that had sprung into her eyes. It was a look that established itself among the memorabilia of an altogether memorable evening.

They had abandoned discussion of the Greers by tacit consent at that point, and from then on the talk had been in a lighter-hearted vein, more appropriate to an event which had been spoken of in advance as a party. It was among his triumphs that he'd twice made her laugh, outright. Nevertheless, it struck him as she drove him home that, after all, they'd done nothing but talk, and he'd perhaps got more entertainment than he'd provided. He might have suggested their going on to a show after dinner. Her having her own little coupé at hand, and her derisive rejection of his proposal to ride out home with her and return in the Elevated, had something to do with this feeling. Also, there was observable about her, at the wheel of her car, a faint re-emergence of her efficient office manner.

Anyhow, when he stood on the pavement outside his own

door—and she with five or six miles still to drive to hers!—there was a touch of apology about his farewell. She'd given him a delightful evening and he hoped she hadn't been too heavily bored with all his talk;—such an unconscionable lot of it, he was afraid, about himself.

At this she smiled at him with a gleam of clear mischief. "Anyway," she remarked, "you've taught me the meaning of the word avuncular. You don't want to forget that!" She didn't leave him, though, on that note, for while he was still stammering for the first word of a reply, she added indignantly:

"Henry! Use your imagination. Forget what you think you're like, for a minute, and think what this evening has been like, for me. Do you suppose I'm used to *better company*? Now, if I say I've had a wonderful time, myself, will you decide I was pretending?"

"There's an easy test of that," he said. "When will you try it again?"

"*Any* time!" she declared, and having shaken hands with him all over again, she drove off and left him jubilant.

3

On the following Sunday afternoon, Jennie got a telegram from Joe Greer. It had been delivered at her flat before noon, but as she had been out for lunch she didn't find it until her return, about four o'clock. He was arriving that day, he said, over the Northwestern, at five-thirty, for a few hours only, as he was going out again that night. He wanted a talk with her and a visit with Trix. She was to telephone direct to Burns to meet him at the station and drive him straight out to her flat.

There were two rather striking singularities about this message and she paused to make sure she understood the implication in it before carrying out its explicit instructions. It was queer that Joe, with so little time at his disposal, should propose wasting any of it driving clear out to her flat when the office, which would be right in his way, would be the natural place for a talk with her;

especially on Sunday afternoon, when it was always quiet. It was not sure to be completely deserted, of course; there was always the chance of an odd draughtsman cleaning up some job or other. And if, for some reason, Joe didn't want any one in the organization, outside herself, to know he'd even been in town . . . She supposed that must be it.

It was also worth remark that he'd instructed her to telephone directly to his chauffeur instead of transmitting the message through his apartment, the natural way to do it unless he wanted to take Beatrice by surprise. This was a familiar form of pleasantry with him and she attributed to him no ulterior intention now. He ran the obvious risk of missing his daughter altogether—just for the pleasure of seeing her start and gasp at the sight of him—for she might easily be out, somewhere, and not recoverable at the last minute. But Jennie believed, in the light of what she'd recently learned from Henry Craven, that he ran a worse risk than this, and for a few minutes she wavered over the alternative of transmitting the message to Burns through Anson, the butler. She could, easily enough, pretend to Joe that she had misread his instructions. And Beatrice would get, in case she needed it, a few hours' warning. If she didn't need it, there would be no harm done beyond the spoiling of her father's boyish joke.

The thing that stood in the way of this humane design was, really, nothing but Jennie's professional pride in her long established infallibility. For seven years Joe had lived in an unshaken certainty that she never misunderstood instructions nor failed to grasp the underlying intent of them, and she couldn't bear the thought of sapping that confidence now. She wasn't afraid of him. She'd mutinied more than once;—refused, point-blank, to carry out his orders and, at the time or afterward, told him why. But these tactics weren't available here, for she couldn't tell him she was unwilling to have the girl taken by surprise, without giving her away altogether.

So, reluctantly, she telephoned George Burns' boarding-house and, disappointingly, found him there. If he'd been out with one of the cars she'd have been justified, she thought, in calling Anson.

The moment she told him who she was, Burns said—not at all in his professional manner, “I was just making up my mind to call you up, Miss MacArthur.” With the wild idea in her head that he might be on the point of proposing a joy-ride, she forbore to ask him why and went straight on with the transmission of Joe's orders.

He repeated mechanically, “Five-thirty at the Northwestern,” was silent for a moment, then added, as she was about to hang up, “Well, that settles it. Miss MacArthur, I've got to see you, at once. If you're at your flat, I'll drive straight out there. There'll still be time to meet the train if we decide that's the thing for me to do. You are telephoning from your flat, aren't you?”

“I don't understand at all,” she protested. “Yes, I'm at my flat, but if something's wrong, tell me what it is, now.”

“I can't, from here,” he said curtly. “I've got to talk to you. Nothing's wrong—no accident, nor anything—only we've got to decide what to do.” A click in the instrument informed her that he'd left the telephone.

There was nothing for her to do but sit in her front window and look out for him, keeping her imagination in control as best she could. It was less than ten minutes before he appeared, but in that time she'd thought of enough horrifying possibilities to fill an evening paper. She was holding the door open for him when he came springing up the stairs.

“Miss Greer isn't at home,” he told her, at once. “She was out all last night. They don't know where she is. That fool of an Anson didn't tell me about it till I called up, after lunch, to find out whether they were going to want me this afternoon. It seems she went out with some people after dinner last night for a swim, over here at the hotel beach.”

At Jennie's horrified stare he impatiently shook his head. "No, she isn't drowned, or there's no reason for thinking so. They got some sort of message about her late last night. Couldn't make anything of it except that she was all right and would be home first thing this morning. I asked Anson why he hadn't got more than that;—if the party that gave the message was drunk. He seemed to think that was disrespectful and none of my business, so he wouldn't say. I guess that was it, though.

"When I told him I was going to start straight out and see if I couldn't find her, he ordered me to do nothing of the sort. I don't know whether he's got a right to give me orders or not. He's been with Mr. Greer, of course, a lot longer than I have. So I was thinking of getting your angle on it. But with him getting in at five-thirty and me with orders to meet him, we're pretty tight up against it."

"Do you really think you could find her?" Jennie asked. "Within the next hour or so?"

"I don't know," he said. "I couldn't promise to. But I've found out from driving her around where a good many of the places are that she goes, and where some of the people live that she runs around with. Of course, I'd have to be careful what sort of questions I asked.—But, damn it, there isn't any time! I ought to be on my way down-town now!"

"You see if you can find the girl," Jennie commanded him crisply. "I'll drive in, in my car, and meet Mr. Greer. I can make it, all right. That lets you out, because I don't have to tell him that I passed on the orders to you at all. I felt like a drive so I came down, myself, instead.—He was coming to talk to me, anyway. I'll keep him as long as I can. Call up Anson whenever you get a chance, to find out whether she hasn't come home by herself. When Mr. Greer is ready to go home, I'll drive him over—and hope you'll have got there first, with her. That's all straight, isn't it?"

He nodded, gave her a probably unconscious military

salute, and sped down to his car. He was a good boy, and he'd do, she thought, a good job, though he'd need a reasonable break in the luck to make it successful. Well, she had a job of her own, on hand, one in which she couldn't foresee that luck would figure at all decisively. It was just a question of how skilfully she could manage Joe.

Luck did befriend her, though, right at the beginning. Joe's train was the better part of an hour late. It was not a train from the North and she'd been wondering a little uneasily whether there might not have been some mistake about his message, when she was doubly reassured by seeing him coming down the platform. The way his face cleared of its glowering abstraction when he caught sight of her waiting for him, made it plain that he was pleased by her amendment to his orders.

"That's what you get for trying to improve on what I tell you!" he said jovially. "Cooling your heels down here half a Sunday afternoon! All the same, I'm glad you did. We'll have a little ride and talk as we go."

He wasn't talkative, though, and after a few perfunctory questions as to how things had been going in the office, whether anything out of the ordinary had happened, how Henry had been acting lately (this last inflected facetiously, of course) he lapsed into the same abstraction she'd seen him in when he got off the train.

She asked him, then, if it was really necessary for him to go away again that night. Now that he was actually here, couldn't he stay long enough to see for himself how things were going? Two or three days couldn't make much difference, could they? He threw a sharp look at her, as if he suspected that something unacknowledged lay behind these questions, but he answered them simply and emphatically by telling her that this was the week the harvesting of the flax began. The machinery he had designed would be put to its first real test with the unloading, crushing, spraying and storing of the straw as it was brought to their warehouses under the varied conditions of the harvest. Some of these conditions they

wouldn't have foreseen. Here and there, something was bound to break down. "Eve of battle, see?" he concluded with a grin. "Sheridan twenty miles away!"

After having worked for him seven years she didn't need all this elaboration, and, of course, he knew it. The question he evidently didn't mean to answer was why he had left the field of battle on the eve of it. She remarked, "You didn't come straight down from the North."

His look conceded a mystery here, and his words made a boyish joke of it. "You'd never have thought of that if you'd let Burns meet me as I told you to.—No, I've been talking to a man who thinks he knows something about flax. When I got through with him I found it was just as easy to go back by way of Chicago."

In his own good time, she knew, he'd tell her the whole story; meanwhile, she was content to wait. She made no further attempt at conversation and merely drove him about at random among the less crowded of the West Side streets. At last he said, quietly:

"Put this on file, Jennie, where you won't forget it. If anything unexpected turns up, before I come back, don't try to find me first. Take it up with Henry and see that he goes straight to Williamson with it. Or to Corbett or Crawford if Williamson isn't where he can get at him. Whatever it is, see that one of them knows about it—you see to that, yourself—before you pass it on to me."

"All right, Joe," she said. She knew it had been to tell her this, exactly this and no more, that he had come to Chicago. He was like that, with her. He'd offer no explanations whatever, no denials that he foresaw the sort of "unexpected" thing that might turn up. He knew she'd ask for nothing of the sort. It was wonderful to be taken for granted, like that. It was this capacity in him for confidence that she came nearest loving him for.

He asked her, presently, in a perfectly natural manner, how Trix had been getting on, lately. She wasn't much of a letter-writer, he said, and it must have been a week since he'd heard from her.

Jennie was ready with her answer. "Why, it's three or four days since I've seen her," she said. "I don't, except when she comes to the office. Henry's been seeing quite a lot of her, though, he tells me,—taking her round to shows and things. You asked how he'd been acting; you know it's wonderful what it's done for him, having his sister away. I've never seen her that I know of, but I think she must be a—horrible sort of woman."

"Oh, I wouldn't go as far as that," he protested. "What have you got against her?"

"I think she must be a sort of vampire," Jennie said judicially; "not a movie vampire but a real one. The kind that sucks your blood. That's the only trouble with Henry. She'd taken all the spunk out of him. Must have been doing it for years. Making him think that people were bored with him, or laughing at him, all the time. He'd be a—peach, if he could be let alone for a while.—I wouldn't have dared talk to you like this three months ago," she added. "I thought, then, she was probably going to marry you."

"My God, Jennie, you too!" he roared at her. "You and Trix and . . . How do you women get that way?"

She made him a provocative answer, but even so she found she hadn't launched him as she'd hoped to do. "Trix wrote that she'd been up to Ravinia with him. Has he been opening up with you, too?"

She confessed to their dinner. "I had an awfully good time with him," she insisted seriously. "I really like him a whole lot."

But this wasn't the line Joe wanted to follow. "Oh, yes, he's all right," he conceded absently. "Best of his gang, by a long way. But what has he been saying to you, now he's opened out?—Anything that would interest me?"

"Everything he said was interesting," she began, honestly puzzled to see what he was driving at, "but there wasn't anything up . . ."

A vivid flash of memory interrupted her, and Joe was

upon her instantly with the demand, "Well, let's hear what it was he told you."

"It was so nearly nothing," she answered, after a moment's reflection, "that I can't tell you what he really said, at all. But I remember getting the idea, just for a minute, that he thought you were in for some sort of hard time that I didn't know anything about. I didn't ask him what he meant, and I haven't thought of it again, since."

Joe laughed grimly. "It was a good hunch, Jennie. He sees something headed my way, all right. So do I, though I haven't made out what it is, yet. Williamson thinks he's got a score to settle with me. He has, too, in a way—though it isn't what he thinks it is."

At the end of a reflective silence, he laughed again. "I was challenged to fight a duel once, down in Quito, by a fat Spaniard about Williamson's build. It never came off because the weapons I chose were a pair of old single-action Colt forty-fives. Shoot it out with him at twenty paces, was my idea. He was game all right. Mad enough for anything; but the seconds objected. Williamson's no Spaniard, though. He balances all his accounts in the ledger.

"Oh, it's nothing to get excited about," he went on, perceiving, Jennie felt, her sudden dismay. "It would come to the same thing anyhow. They haven't any idea, none of that gang, what a whale of a proposition this is going to be. They haven't seen the country, and they don't even guess at the clean-up that's waiting for us there. Not ten years from now, Jennie, nor five. We can get ten per cent. of next year's crop if we go at it right. You just sit down sometime and figure out what that'll mean. When they do that, they'll try to take the thing away from us. That's just as sure as to-morrow's sunrise. Hell, of course they will. You know that as well as I do. We've always known it. That's the sort of people they are. But this thing that Henry sees may be something new. Something they are starting sooner than they mean to. That's what we've got to be ready for.

"For thirty years or so," he went on after a long reflective silence, "I've known that before I got through I was going to have one hell of a big fight with this stall-fed bunch. You might say I'd been looking forward to it, in a way. I used to look forward to it, for a fact. Thought it would be a cinch, they looked so soft and helpless. Blithering sort of people! But they aren't so easy as they look, Jennie. I can see that from here. They are fat, and they're soft, but if a man happened to be down where they could trample on him, they'd be damned heavy. They've got a lot of queer weapons, too. Things you wouldn't think they'd use, that get into you in a way you don't expect. And, my God, how they stick together! They and their wives and their poor relations . . . !—How about Henry, Jennie? When it comes to a showdown, I mean. I know he likes us and he doesn't care a damn for them, really. But if it came down to a vote, say, in directors' meeting, is there a tinker's chance that he'd come over to us? A whole lot might hang on that, you know."

"I think he might," she said, "if he saw that the right was on our side."

"It's so damn unlikely it will be on our side, though," he mused. "Having the right on their side is one of the best things they do;—sort of a specialty of theirs. All the same, we may get Henry anyhow, one way or another.—All right, Jennie! We've got nothing more on our minds, have we? Let's go back. I want to see Trix. First I've ever—missed anybody, just like that."

They were out in Humboldt Park, by now. Jennie had pulled up in the parking space beside the refectory where they could watch the children playing in the rowboats on the lagoon. She wanted to keep him longer if she could. Burns hadn't had a fair chance yet.

"I'm hungry, Joe," she said. "Shan't we go in here and get a bite of supper first?" She hated lying to him—and doing it so badly, too! Her voice sounded wrong in her own ears.

He looked round at her in open surprise. "We aren't

a half hour's drive from home," he observed. "I'm hungry myself. You'll come home and have supper with Trix and me."

She argued against this. He'd want Trix to himself after his long absence. Besides, she didn't know Beatrice well enough to come popping into supper without any warning. She might have other guests.—Or for that matter, she might not be at home to-night, herself.

"That's the funniest line of reasoning I ever heard you put up," he commented bluntly, and then, telling her to wait a minute, he got out of the car. "Going to telephone," he called back as he walked away.

Well, she'd done all she could. She could think of no other stratagem and if she could, she wouldn't avail herself of it. She wouldn't have Joe looking at her again with that gleam of half-awakened suspicion—not for Beatrice, nor for any one in the world. Not even for Joe, himself.

"She isn't at home, for a fact," he told her as he climbed back into the little coupé. "They're expecting her any minute. I told Anson you and I'd be coming for supper."

She didn't know whether there was any authentic comfort to be derived from this or not. Burns might have found Trix or the girl might herself have telephoned at last, but Anson would, most likely, have said just what he did, in any case. Jennie drove as slowly as she dared until a restless movement of Joe's betrayed his suspicion that this was what she was doing; after that she bored into the dense Sunday traffic like a taxi driver. Four or five minutes one way or the other weren't likely to make much difference, whereas the arousing of Joe's jungle sense of something amiss would be, almost certainly, disastrous.

The exact minute of their arrival did make a difference, as things turned out, but whether for the better or the worse, Jennie was unable to decide. As she slipped her Ford into the south-bound stream of traffic in Sheridan Road, a block north of Joe's apartment building, he re-

marked, "There she is! We're right on time. That's the roadster, three cars ahead of us. Funny she's letting Burns drive; getting bored with it, already, I suppose."

The big roadster was standing before Joe's doorway, in the curve of the semi-elliptical drive, when Jennie turned in, but neither Beatrice nor the chauffeur had made any move to alight. The top was down and they could see that he had spoken to her and was tensely awaiting an answer. She was slumped low in her seat, nothing visible of her but the top of her small hat.

That Joe had instantly perceived something wrong was evident. He did not hail and it was with the silent swiftness of a big cat that he left Jennie's car and made his way to the curb side of the other. Burns' head went back at the apparition of him as from the impact of a blow. Then, as if he had to overcome a certain rigidity, he got down from under the wheel and faced his employer. So far, no one had said a word, but now Beatrice roused herself.

"Is that you, dad, for a fact?" she asked, sitting half erect. "I didn't know you'd come home. Honest, I didn't. Thought thoughtful George, here, was . . ." "Stringing me" seemed to be what she was trying to say, but its linguistic difficulties were too much for her. It was blazingly clear that she was drunk.

Joe took Burns by the shoulders and pulled him round between himself and the girl. The two faces, the bearded one contorted by passion, the young clean-shaven one expressionless, were not six inches apart.

"Where have you been with her? What in hell have you been doing with her?"

"Bringing her home, sir. She'd gone out not knowing you were coming. When I got word of it, I followed where she'd gone and told her. And she came back with me."

"If there was any liquor on your breath, I'd kill you where you stand.—That's the truth, is it?"

"Yes, sir. And I haven't had a drink in eight weeks. That's true, too."

Nothing, Jennie believed, but the fact that the big car was cramped across the full width of the narrow drive, had held her a witness to this scene, for the impulse to panic flight had been strong upon her from the moment the girl spoke. But pity took its place as she saw Joe accept the truth of the chauffeur's statement. The gesture with which he let the man go and the look he then turned upon his daughter were the most tragic expressions she had ever seen.

Tragedy, though, was not all that Beatrice saw in her father's face, as he moved round the car to the side where she was sitting. She cried out, not loud but with manifest terror, as he came near.

The cry restored Jennie's motor faculties. She slipped swiftly from her seat in the Ford and went to meet him, ready to help or to interpose against him as might seem necessary. He said, "Wait a minute, Jennie," but she did not stop.

"You can't stay out here," she answered. "I'll help you in with her."

"She isn't going to need any help," he said. "I'll tell you what I want of you, presently."

He turned to the girl. "Look at me, now," he commanded, "and listen. Whatever you've been this afternoon, you're sober now. You're going to get out of this car by yourself and walk with me into that corridor and go up in the elevator as if nothing had happened or was going to happen. When we get into the apartment you'll go into your own room to take off your hat. And you'll wait in there till I come in. You understand all that, don't you?"

She was trembling to the lips but she pressed them together and nodded her head. "All right," he said. "Take a minute to think it over." Then he turned back to Jennie.

"Burns will drive you home in his car. He can put up your Ford in the garage first. You pack a hand-bag and a trunk. Bring the bag back with you in the car, in about

an hour. Leave directions for the trunk to be sent here to-morrow. You're going to live here for a while."

A protest, the mere mechanical reaction of surprise, sprang to her lips but before she could say more than a word he cut her short.

"That's not an order, of course, Jennie. But if we're friends, you'll do it. I've got to go back to-night. No getting out of that. And somebody's got to be here. You'll go to the office when and how you can. We'll talk about that later. But you'll do it for me, Jennie?"

"I'll do anything you like, of course," she said. "But I think I'd better come in with you, now."

A gleam of clear menace in his eyes and an uncontrolled movement of his hands showed how truly she'd seen beneath his surface quietness. "I want her to myself, for a while," he said. But he added instantly, at her gesture of dissent, "I'm not going to hurt her. Give you my word for that.—Here, we'll leave it to her! Trix, do you want Miss MacArthur along for protection, or will you come with me?"

"I'll—I'll be all right with you," she said.

He opened the off-side door for her and with the unobtrusive guidance of his hand she stepped down into the road-way. "I'll be all right," she repeated. She released herself from his hand and rather slowly, very erect and infinitely pitiable, she walked to the door. Joe, with a wordless nod of dismissal to the other pair, followed her.

From George Burns as he drove Jennie home, she got an account of what had happened. He told it with an appearance of dispassion that was betrayed only occasionally by a flash of intense feeling. She had not pressed him for it and he had taken his time about deciding to talk at all, so that they drove the first half of the way in silence, but the conclusion he came to evidently was that she had better be put in full possession of the facts.

He'd had no trouble finding Miss Greer. He had already learned from Anson who most of the original swim-

ming party were, so he went straight to the hotel beach and talked with the professional instructor there. The questions he asked were not about Beatrice but about another young woman he knew was in the party, a married woman whose husband had quarreled with her a few weeks ago and left her. The swimming professional's natural surmise would be that the chauffeur had been unofficially retained by the husband to pick up significant facts about the wife. "It happened he did make me a proposition like that the other day," Burns interpolated, "but I turned him down." The party had been talking over their plans for the rest of the evening before they left the beach, and a good long drive up the shore had been agreed upon. A certain married couple in the company had offered drinks as an objective.

Burns knew where they lived. They'd taken a house for the summer, on the lake a little north of Glencoe. It sounded like a good steer to him, so he drove straight up there as fast as he could and told the servant who answered his ring that he'd come with an important message for Miss Greer. She was there, all right, and he ought to have been in plenty of time, as it was only just after six o'clock. He was told that they were all in bathing, so he went down to the beach below the house, and found them.

"It was about the worst lot of hang-overs I ever saw," he told Jennie candidly. "They must have been a drunken bunch the night before, for fair. They were lying around the sand, in bathing suits, most of them—Miss Greer was all right—trying to get up nerve enough to go into the water. It was pretty cold, with the off-shore wind. Just what they needed to sober them up.—A lot of rich bums, that's all most of them are."

"I told Miss Greer about the telegram and asked her to dress as fast as she could and come along with me. She was a little bit—boozy (it doesn't take but a little to put her out), but she'd have been all right by the end of the drive home."

"But the rest of the gang pretended they didn't believe her father was coming. They've been kidding her more or less, it seems, about liking me, and their gag was that I'd made it up—or that she and I had made it up between us, in order to go off by ourselves. They hadn't any reason for making a crack like that. It's just the natural rottenness of their minds. They said they'd all come up to the house and telephone Miss Greer's apartment to see if it was true or not.

"I ought to have let them do it, of course, but I was so mad I was rattled and I told her I didn't think they knew at the house that her father was coming. The orders had come straight through to me. That raised a howl, of course, and left her not knowing whether to believe me or not.

"She finally came along with me up to the house to dress, but most of the men in the crowd came along, too, joshing her and arguing with her. They were good-natured enough, all but one. He's a fellow named Ware, who's been going around with her a good deal lately. He was pretty ugly, to me; tried to 'put me in my place,' but wasn't quite sober enough to do it. He was the only man in the crowd who wasn't in a bathing suit.

"Miss Greer finally agreed to go in and dress and told me to wait in the car for her. They all went into the house together, though. I waited about half an hour; then I rang the front-door bell and walked right in, just as she was coming down the stairs ready to start. I tried to get her to go straight out with me and get in the car, but the rest of them were in the dining-room—you could hear them in there, all right—and she wanted to go in and say good-by to them.

"I went along with her. They'd got out some more hooch and offered her a drink, for a pick-me-up, they said. I knew what would happen if that started and asked her not to take anything. I suppose it was a mistake. They guyed her about it pretty strong and got her mad at me, so that she ordered me out to the car to wait for her.

Said she'd come when she got ready. There was nothing else for me to do that I could see, unless I could have cleaned up the whole bunch and carried her off by force, and I don't believe I could have got away with that.

"It was about fifteen minutes more before she came out, with Ware, the others following along behind. I don't know how much she'd had to drink in there but it was enough to do the business for her. Ware had put on a dust-coat and cap and he walked straight up to the driving seat and got in. Miss Greer had asked him to drive her home, he said.

"I was holding the door for her on the other side and I waited till she was fixed and I could shut the door after her. I told her to stay right where she was and then I went around to Ware. He'd started the motor but hadn't got his gear-shift in. I grabbed him by the wrist and told him to get out; put a good twist on it too, so that he yelped.

"He tumbled out, all right, and then started for me. I didn't think he'd do that, but it's what I'd been praying for, for about a month. I'd have rather had him sober, but it's all right. He'll have what I gave him a long time after he's sobered up. I got in twice on his right eye and I think I broke his nose. And I gave him one in the pit of his stomach to finish him off;—all inside of half a minute. The rest didn't want any. Lucky for me, I guess. I knew just where there was a handy spanner and I'd 've liked to have waded in with it. I might have killed somebody just as well as not."

He paused, and Jennie asked her first question. "Beatrice didn't try to get out of the car?"

"No," he said, and added after another pause: "She was perfectly willing to come with me."

Evidently, though, the drive home with her wasn't to furnish many details. "She was pretty excited one way and another—" he summarized, presently, "but when she quieted down she was sort of dopey, just like you saw her. I stopped at a cafeteria on the way down and tried to get

her to come in and have some black coffee, but she wouldn't and I didn't want to start anything conspicuous. I'd have tried harder but I thought there was a pretty good chance, if Mr. Greer was going to have a long business talk with you, that I could get her home ahead of him. Happening the way it did was just exactly wrong."

"That's what I thought, at the time," Jennie said. "I'm not sure, though, that it didn't happen just exactly right."

"To make her father put his foot down on her?" he asked, and shook his head skeptically. "I don't believe it does anybody any good to be showed up looking worse than they really are. Specially not when they're young. And a man like that—like Mr. Greer—will always sort of half believe the worst about it. Every time he gets mad, he'll show her that he believes it.—I never thought I had much of a chance, but when I look at the kind of chance she's had . . . ! She's a fine girl, Miss MacArthur,—poisoned!"

He had more to say about her, now he was fairly started, to which Jennie listened only half attentively. She'd taken to swimming and diving as naturally as a seal. Born in her, it was; she'd never learned at all until she came to Chicago. And she could drive a car—as far as mere driving went—as well as George himself. She was as quick as lightning. She had all the pluck in the world, and never lost her head. She'd have made a wonder of a flyer if she'd been a man. And she was a lot smarter than most men; took after her father in that, George supposed. Unconsciously and, to Jennie rather pathetically, he was giving himself away, hand over hand. Before he'd brought her back to Joe's apartment, he'd given her a lot to think about.

This was the better part of two hours later, for she gave Joe all the time she could in which to get the girl sober and reach an understanding with her—assuming any understanding whatever was possible. She looked forward to her return to that flat as to the crater of an ac-

tive volcano. But her foresight, here, was altogether at fault. Joe himself let her in, carried her bag to the room that was to be hers and asked her, when she was ready, to come out into the library for a smoke with him. Trix, he said, was asleep.

His mood was strangely slack and his manner quieter than any she could remember in him. He knew how she hated taking this job, he said, but it wouldn't be for very long. By the middle of September, he thought, he'd be able to be at home again, permanently except for short trips. Meanwhile, Jennie possessed his full authority over everything. Trix understood this and agreed to it; seemed to be glad, rather than otherwise, that Jennie was coming, since she had been lonely as the devil.

"She's got, though," he told her, "the better half of that original thousand I sent her, tucked away, somewhere; and if she really makes up her mind to quit you won't be able to stop her. No more could I, of course. You'll do as well as I've done, I guess, and if she goes I won't lay it up against you. But keep her for me if you can, Jennie."

"Are you sure," she asked—it wasn't a comfortable sort of question—"that Beatrice understood what you expect me to do? I mean, that she will understand it when she wakes up in the morning and finds you gone—and me here?"

"Was she sober enough to understand it—is that what you mean? Yes, of course she was. She wasn't very drunk when Burns brought her in, dazed more than anything else, and rattled at seeing me. I gave her something that fixed her up, right off. That's one sort of doctoring I know all about, anyhow. God, I never thought I'd need it for my own daughter, though!"

"However, that's bygones, absolutely. You want to remember that, Jennie. The slate's clean. It wasn't her fault in the first place. Mine a whole lot more than hers."

He poured himself a drink and settled himself in a big

chair. "I was beginning to get a fool idea that some of these people we were doing business with were the sort we could tie up to; make friends with, as we settled down, you know. That's the bottom of the whole trouble. Trix found 'em out for a lot of rotters before I did, I'll say that for her, but I came around to her way of thinking before I went north. We'll do business with 'em, Jennie, up to the hilt—farther than they expect, maybe, but that's all we'll do. Why, that woman, Williamson's wife, promised to give Trix a hand, show her the ropes a bit as she needed it; asked me not to send her east with Henry's sister so she could have a good time with her girl's crowd. And then never looked at her. Trix says she asked the girl, Dodo, they call her, to lunch one day and bring a friend of hers along, and they turned her down cold.

"Well, I could have told her they would, by that time. I'd had my own experience, by then. There are some kinds of things I didn't suppose I could ever be surprised about, any more, but, my God, I was mistaken. Found out I hadn't been named Joseph for nothing, either. Now if you know your Bible you can go as far as you like.—

"You know I've always said we were a different breed of cats from that gang. That's what we are. A different breed, people like you and me. And Trix too. I forgot that for a while, but I'm straightened out on it now. The only way to treat 'em is to lick hell out of 'em, so they won't try to trample you, and then let 'em alone. They can say what they like and think what they please, and we don't care one damn. That's what I was telling Trix before she went to sleep. We're going to turn over and start with a clean page."

There was nothing very new about any of this to Jennie, except that it didn't sound like Joe; there was none of his characteristic effervescence about it; it was like flat champagne. She wished he'd drink some champagne instead of morosely sipping that whisky. She could think of nothing comforting or stimulating to say to him; the flatness of his mood seemed contagious.

"There's a swine named Ware," he said, after a period of dark rumination, "who's been at the bottom of most of this trouble. He's one of their lot, though I guess they know what a rotter he is. Trix met him at the Williams' the one day we were up there. One of these days, when I get around to it, I'll deal with him—separately."

"Did Beatrice tell you how he's already been dealt with?" Jennie asked. Evidently not, for Joe asked what she meant. Had Burns been telling her about to-day's affair? How much did she know about it?

She'd rather hoped for a chance to tell Joe the story of the boy's resourcefulness and loyalty, but she felt a little uncertain as she began whether it had been wise or not to launch out upon it—a misgiving which deepened as she went on. Was the chauffeur's account contradicting, in some vital way, the story Trix had told her father? His dark set face was disquieting but not informative. She condensed the tale as much as she dared, but Ware's licking, which must be accounted for as well as described, involved a lot.

Uneasy as she'd been all the while she talked, she was utterly unprepared for the line Joe took when she finished. "The first thing to do to-morrow morning," he said, "is to let him go. See to that, will you?"

"Let him go!" she cried incredulously. "George Burns! After what he's done for you to-day! You don't want me to do that, Joe! I *wouldn't* do it."

Her defiance didn't arouse him at all. "I'll let him know to-night then that he's discharged. Guess that'd be better anyway." He said it without conviction but equally without any sign of wavering.

"That'll be the first really unfair thing I've ever known you to do, Joe.—If you really do it. I don't believe you will. You can't reward a really fine service that way. Why, if she'd been drowning, and he'd . . ."

"I know all that," he interrupted. "And I'll reward him, too. You can write him any sort of recommendation you like, to-night, and I'll sign it. Write him a check, too,

for a thousand dollars, and I'll sign that. Look here! You've always kicked on my keeping him as a chauffeur, haven't you? Said he was too good for it. Well, now I'm doing what you've always wanted me to. That thousand will get him two years' schooling, if he wants it. Or set him up in a little business for himself. Buy him a taxicab. Anything he likes. As a reward for what he did to-day. Nothing unfair about that, is there? The only string on it is that he's got to keep away from me and my daughter. I don't want him around.

"Because he *was* mixed up in that mess, more or less. Else, how did he know how to find her as easy as that? Why wouldn't they believe him when he said he had a message from me? You can see that yourself! For that matter, why did Trix keep all that end of it dark? She did. You've given it away, you know.

"—I told her we were going to let bygones be bygones. Start with a clean slate. Well, we are! I'm never going to ask her another question. Even about this. But if she or you has got any idea I'll keep a man working for me as chauffeur who she's let get to know her as well as he seems to, you're making a big mistake."

"I really believe," Jennie said deliberately, "that George Burns—chauffeur or not—is the best friend Beatrice has to-day. I believe he's got the best influence over her. He's certainly done more than either Henry Craven or I, though we've worried and wondered and done what we could. But he's really—held out a hand to her, I guess. It's only a guess, of course."

"Well, now you've said it yourself!" he declared. "I won't have her making friends with a man like that. Friends—hell! Three months of a friendship like that and father gets a telegram from Crown Point saying, 'We're married.' There's one in the newspaper every morning. But it's a thing that isn't going to happen in my family, and that's a tip you can bet on. And when you hire a new chauffeur, to-morrow, see that you get one that there won't be any temptation to hold hands with."

A certain penetrative power which she'd always found in his mental processes up to now, was lacking to-night. It was as if a light had been switched off. And in the absence of it she was conscious of a sort of stupid vulgarity about his way of seeing and putting things. He was still suffering from the shock Beatrice had given him, fumbling about in a twilight, upsetting things. She hated having him go away to-night leaving these irrevocable decisions behind him and with a touch of real timidity she urged, again, his staying over one more day.

As she'd feared, this only irritated him. "Can't you understand plain facts?" he snapped at her. "I've got to be on the ground to-morrow night. We begin receiving in the Number One warehouse Tuesday morning. And I haven't got any aeroplane. Anyhow, I'm glad to go. Had about enough for one trip,—and I guess Trix has had enough of me."

His manner turned kindlier when it came time for him to go and he tried as best he could to reassure her. He wouldn't quarrel with Burns, nor make the boy feel that he was being dismissed. Jennie needn't worry about that. And he was sure she wouldn't have any trouble with Beatrice. "She understands that I'm backing you up, whatever you do, and that it won't do her any good to appeal to me over your head. I don't believe she'll try it, but if she does I promise it won't get her anything. Your veto goes with me."

"But what's the child going to *do*?" Jennie asked desperately, of the universe rather than of Joe. "What is there she *can* do?"

His answer was that she could do any of the things decent people ordinarily did. She was to cut out drinking, dancing in tough cabarets and nocturnal joy-riding. She was to steer clear, altogether, of the gang she had been running with. But even after these deletions there was still plenty left, as far as he could see.

4

It seemed to Jennie that two people could hardly be brought into close quarters in a situation more thoroughly false and hopeless than this that Joe had left her and Beatrice in. For three days she avoided discussion with the girl, though whether this was tactics or cowardice on her own part, she couldn't feel sure. She was anxious not to take a line until she could work one out that showed promise of getting them somewhere.

Trix, who had never particularly liked her, undoubtedly detested her, now. An attitude, therefore, appropriate to a friendly guest and companion would be so glaring an affectation as to be, to the girl, insufferable. Yet the only obvious alternative, a governessy middle-aged pose, authority made easy by bits of encouragement, orders sugar-coated into the form of advice and suggestion, would drive her to open rebellion—if not, Jennie reflected, to homicide!

Meanwhile, lying low, going early to the office and coming back just in time for dinner, bringing home work to do in the evening, sticking to a casual preoccupied and not over-friendly tone in the strictly unimportant conversation she addressed to the girl, she found a *modus vivendi* establishing itself. On the first morning at breakfast, in reply to a domestic question raised by the butler upon the tentative presumption that she was now the head of the household, she had told him to go on taking his orders from Miss Greer as usual.

After dinner that same night Beatrice brought the question up, explicitly. "Anson says you told him I was to go on giving the orders. Is that what you meant?"

"Heavens!" said Jennie, looking round her paper, "I don't know anything about running an establishment like this. You'll have to do that."

"Does that take in the cars, too—and the new chauffeur?"

Jennie ignored the overt resentment in the last phrase. "Why not! I've no use for him. I drive my own!"

It struck her as she plunged back into her reading (too suddenly, she was aware, for good histrionism) that her young ward looked a bit let down. If she'd been luxuriating in the close-confinement, bread-and-water theory, this treatment was sound—as far as it went.

But it went nowhere near far enough. It supplied insufficient material even for small talk, let alone real companionship. Jennie found her rule, to do nothing and to say nothing except when there was something perfectly obvious for her to do or say, wearing pretty thin. Finally, after their third dinner together, a meal eaten dismally through in almost total silence, Beatrice exploded.

"I think, after this," she said, "I'll have my meals in my room. I can't stand this. It's too—ghastly."

"It is ghastly," Jennie agreed, "and it's ridiculous. I've had all I can stand of it myself. Of all the preposterous, idiotic things your father ever did, chucking you and me together like this is the worst! I don't know what to do about it, any better than you do. I've been afraid to open my mouth for three days, for fear of getting in worse with you than I was, and I was in badly enough, already. I'm ready to try saying everything that comes into my head and see what happens. It can't be worse than this. Perhaps if you do the same thing, we may get somewhere."

Trix had been staring at her, from the first words, in blank simple incredulity at first, later through a tangle of contradictory surmises and doubts. She went on staring, for a while, after Jennie had done. "All right," she said, at last. "This is what I'm thinking. If you hate it like this, and think it's idiotic of father to have asked you to come here, why did you do it?"

"I'm terribly fond of him," Jennie answered instantly. "Not the way I guess you thought I was when you first came out here. I've never been in love with him, and he's never tried to make love to me. But there's hardly anybody I've cared for as much as I do for him,—and there's nobody on God's green earth that I'd go as far for, in the

way of doing what he wanted me to. He looked so perfectly sick and helpless last Sunday night over what had happened, that it never occurred to me, till he'd gone off and left me here, that I'd had any choice in the matter."

"You're on his side, though," the girl remarked. "You don't care anything about me. You've made that plain enough from the first."

"Don't hint," Jennie commanded crisply. "We've made a good start talking out. Let's keep it up. How did I make it plain I didn't like you?"

"You've never come here to the house, since I've been here, though he's asked you to, he says. But you used to come, before that."

"You never asked me to come. I thought you would when you made up your mind I was all right, and I'd wait for that.—But of course I'm on his side," Jennie went on. "As I said, I'm fond of him. All I've cared about you was whether you were going to make him happy or miserable. That's all I've had a chance to care about, because I don't know you very well. I think I could get to like you, if we ever had a decent human chance. You're enough like him, for that.

"But in this last particular mess I was on your side. I did all I could to keep it from being a mess. I met Joe at the train, myself, and lied to him about the reason why—which isn't a thing I like to do with people I care about. I kept him away from home as long as I possibly could, to give George Burns a chance to bring you back, first. So I haven't been an—enemy, exactly."

The girl's eyes were smoldering. "If you weren't an enemy, why did you give George away?" she asked sullenly.

"That was my mistake," Jennie admitted. "I didn't think of it as giving him away. I thought he'd done a good job and I wanted him to get the credit for it. When I saw how Joe was taking it, it was too late to stop."

"I should think you might have known!"

It wasn't a gracious reception of an apology, but there

was a note of wavering in it, that gave the older woman an intimation of victory. She was content to say, "That's right; I suppose I might have," and waited.

"Oh, I haven't got anything against you—especially," Trix broke out, at last. "And I don't suppose it's your fault that you're here. But—did *you* ever have anybody watching you and telling tales on you? Making that their business? Well, you'd hate it, too. And you'd hate any body that did it. And the nicer and smoother they tried to be, the more you'd hate them.—I don't know why you've been letting me alone, like you have; having me give the orders and letting me go wherever I liked in the car . . ."

"But you think it was because I was trying to get something on you, to report to Joe? Is that it? Good lord! Talk about poisoning wells! I don't mean you,—nor Joe, either. But what a situation!"

She took a minute to think it over; blankly, at first, but then she began to find her line. "Look here, Trix," she said; "we'll sign a treaty. I'll give you my word not to write any letters to Joe about you, or about anything that concerns you. You manage the correspondence yourself. If we come to a final smash, I'll write and tell him why, but I'll show you the letter before it goes. In the meantime, I'm not a spy. I'm not watching you, and I'm not having you watched, either. I won't ask the new chauffeur where you've been. That's the sort of thing I mean. Is that all right, as far as it goes?"

The girl had curled herself up in a corner of the davenport, her chin in the crook of an elbow. There was something compact about her poses, even in relaxation. She looked quite a lot like a young tom-cat. She said nothing to Jennie's proposal for the better part of a minute, when she did speak it was not to answer.

"What do you want me to promise, on my side?" she asked.

"I can't think of anything I want to ask you to promise." Jennie had put a faint stress on the word *ask*, but

she didn't know whether it had reached the girl's ear or not.

After another silence Beatrice asked, "Does that include telegrams, too?—That you won't send father, about me?"

Until she tacked on the supplementary question, Jennie hadn't the least idea what she was talking about. "Telegrams?" she echoed. Then as the meaning broke over her, "Oh! . . . Good God!"

The surge of contemptuous disgust at a suspicion so mean, and a mind ungenerous enough to entertain it, was openly revealed in her tone. Trix looked round, met Jennie's eyes and then lowered her own.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I beg your pardon for asking that.—Only what are you doing it *for*? If you're that kind of a person, why did you come? And if you despise me like that and—and aren't going to tell on me, why do you stay? I know you hate it. You said you did. And it seemed as if there must be a trick about it, somehow."

Jennie's mood veered suddenly round to pity. "You poor child," she said; "you have had a rotten time of it, haven't you? I'll try to tell you the why of it all, as far as I'm concerned. I came, as I did, because Joe wanted me to. It was a little weak-minded of me, I guess. One of the things in the world I'm proud of is the idea he's got that I never fail him. He certainly needed help from somewhere, Sunday night, so when he asked me for it, I said I'd try.—On the off chance, to tell the truth, that I could make a better job of it than he had. I can do better than he, once in a while, with certain kinds of things.

"I'll tell you why I thought perhaps I could, here. It's because you're so much like him. I've worked for him—and with him—for seven years, which is seven times as long, he says, as any one else ever lasted. I know his faults like a book. He's suspicious, just the way you are. He's got the devil's own temper. He doesn't bother—much—about other people's rights; expects them to look

out for their own, and fight for them if necessary. And along with all that, he's the biggest man I know, and the ablest, and one of the most lovable. I've got on with him, and been a help to him, and I'm proud of it. And since you're like him, I was interested to see whether I couldn't get on with you, too; and be a help to you.

"He's handicapped with you, of course, by the fact that he adores you. I've never known him to be like that, before. Ever since he wrote you that letter. He's been like a boy about you; fierce and proud—and some times downright idiotic. Well, I don't adore you,—no more than I do him. If I'd adored him—or been afraid of him—I'd have lasted about one month.

"I've made up my mind I'll try treating you the way I've always treated him. I've never told tales on him. He's found out that when he tells me a thing, it's buried. I don't even tell it back to him as a reminder. That's why I won't tell tales of you. You'll find it out, gradually, if there's time enough. I never ask him questions. Sometimes he tells me things for fun, and sometimes to see how they strike me,—but never because I claim any right to know. I won't claim any such rights with you. You aren't under any obligation to me. You don't have to ask my permission to do anything. You don't even have to pretend you like me;—he never bothered to do that. I'm here, that's all. I'm intelligent and shock-proof and experienced. Experienced in more ways than you're likely to think.—I mean, I'm not an old maid, exactly."

"How old are you?" Trix asked.

"Oh, I'm old enough," said Jennie, composedly; "thirty-four."

This seemed to be about all. She got up, lighted herself a cigarette, unfolded an evening paper and carried it across to the windows. Then she heard Beatrice speaking.

"You aren't old enough to have been my mother. But I wish my mother had been a person like you. I wish I'd known somebody like you—before this."

Jennie's "line," which she'd been feeling a bit too complacent about, failed her suddenly at this point. It was beautifully logical to decide to treat the girl, in all situations, as she'd have treated the girl's father;—but what would she have done with Joe, if, at the end of one of their talks, he'd burst into tears?

She went back to the davenport, patted the heaving shoulder, clumsily she felt, tried to say something encouraging—and, to her consternation, heard her own voice break and saw Beatrice swim away in a blur of tears.

The break caught the girl's attention, instantly. She stopped weeping, sprang up, took a look to make sure and, with a laugh, flung her arms round Jennie. "You aren't as hard-boiled as you let on to be," she said.

"I was a fool to say I was experienced, anyhow," Jennie admitted. "I've hardly ever *seen* anybody cry before. I suppose I'll have to get used to it."

She was, however, much too experienced in the ways of human fallibility to fall into the error of supposing that merely by winning the opening skirmish she had established, permanently, the sound sane relation with Joe's daughter which any real help would have to be built upon.

Trix, having hated her, whole-heartedly, started swinging now quite to the other end of the arc. Jennie had not worked in the stenographers' rooms of numerous big business offices without learning what the sort of sentimental affection known as a "crush" is like. She had, though not often, been made the unwilling recipient of attentions of this sort and she had always hated them, sensing their fundamental unhealthiness. She couldn't have imagined herself reciprocating an attachment of this sort. Yet now, with Beatrice, she was slow in recognizing the familiar manifestations as belonging in that category.

Trix began getting up for breakfast with her, coming to the table in nightgown and robe, pouring her coffee, making her toast, superfluously seeing to it that everything was exactly right;—superfluously because Joe's domestic service was always perfect anyhow. He was one of those

men who have the knack of getting it. But the child did succeed in investing the utilitarian meal with an atmosphere which Jennie enjoyed, though it was to the detriment of the morning paper. Then she constituted herself Jennie's chauffeur, driving her down-town every morning with great elan in the roadster and calling for her faithfully every night; a real inconvenience, this was, since Jennie was used to being free to come and go when she liked. Yet she found herself surprisingly reluctant to rebel at it. And she did enjoy their long rides, before or after dinner. Trix was an amazingly good driver, just on the hither side of recklessness and held there by faultless judgment and skill.

"You ought to have been an aviator," Jennie said once, at the end of a vivid ten seconds during which she'd held her breath.

"So I've been told," the girl remarked, "by some one who ought to know." At the end of another mile she made it clear enough who this was. "George Burns was a flyer in the war—practically."

When Jennie, with a laugh, inquired how he could be "practically" a flyer and not really one, she explained, with a certain degree of feeling. "They never gave the enlisted men a dog's chance to get pilots' licenses. George was a mechanic, but he was going up all the time, of course, and some of his officers were decent enough to let him drive. Ashamed not to, I guess, because he was better at it than most of them. He could do all the stunts. Isn't it rotten that he never could have a chance! When you think of some of the chumps that go strutting around with a pair of wings."

Jennie didn't believe, she said, that many of the men with wings on their blouses were chumps, but she agreed, without reservation, that it was rotten about George.

"Oh, he should worry!" Trix exclaimed. "He's flying now, all right. Got a good job in the air mail service."

Jennie remembered her treaty and suppressed the question that was on her tongue, but this restraint cost her

some painful uncertainties. She felt more doubtful of her loyalty to Joe during the ensuing hours than she'd ever been before. She had volunteered nothing to Beatrice concerning the details of Burns' dismissal, of the "reward" Joe had paid him and the condition attached to it. Trix might very well be ignorant of this whole matter, even if she were in communication (as she deliberately had hinted) with the man. An enlightenment on this point might make a vital difference, both in her feelings toward him and toward her father. If George was pretending to be a martyr he ought to be exposed, forthwith. But Jennie held doggedly to her line. She owed her present strong position in Trix's regard to the way she'd lived up to her promise not to meddle, and she wouldn't, even at this apparently critical point, begin meddling now.

She was rewarded by a measure of reassurance that night before she went to bed. She'd retired to her room, got into dressing-gown and slippers and was belatedly reading the financial news in the evening paper. This had more than an academic interest for her—she always had an iron or two of her own in LaSalle Street,—but she was not so absorbed in it that the sound of Trix's opening door didn't instantly divert her attention. A moment later the girl came in, in her nightgown, her hair loose about her shoulders, thrust aside the paper and sat down on the arm of Jennie's chair.

"You're a peach, Jennie," she said. "And I'm a pig. It was in the paper, about George being one of the mail pilots. I thought I'd show it to you when I read it, and then I thought I wouldn't." She gave a little laugh and asked, "You didn't think I'd been going with him on the sly, did you?"

"I supposed he'd written to you," Jennie admitted. "I never thought of its being in the paper."

The girl sat thoughtfully silent a while, stroking Jennie's forearm, an absent-minded impersonal caress, much like having a kitten rub itself against your legs. Pres-

ently, though, the quality of it changed. She took the older woman by the shoulders in a grip and looked intently into her eyes.

"You're the only person in the world who's like that," she declared. "Anybody else, the minute I said that about him, would have thought of something horrid. And believed it, too, as quick as they thought of it. Dad, quicker than anybody.—And, oh, the hell he'd have raised about it!"

"There's a reason for that, you don't want to forget," Jennie reminded her. "He—adores you. You're the only thing in the world he really cares about."

Again there came a change in the look of the girl's face, in the quality of her smile, in the feel of her hands. She slipped from the chair-arm down into Jennie's lap, curled herself there and went soft and heavy. "Don't you love me a little bit, yourself?" she asked.

"Oh—say half of that," Jennie replied contentedly. But at the end of a five minutes' silence she roused herself briskly and pushed the girl away. "It's pretty near one o'clock, and by half-past eight to-morrow morning I've got to be somewhere where they expect me to be worth my salt. Run along and let me get some sleep!"

"I'll drive you down," Trix said through a yawn as she made her reluctant way toward the door.

"Not to-morrow," Jennie answered decisively. "I've got to do a lot of running around during the day, and I'll want the Ford."

Trix shot back a quick look at her, faintly suspicious and openly resentful, a look which Jennie rewarded with a laugh. "Oh, just as you like," the girl said, with a shrug; "good night."

It was true enough; Jennie was going to want her own car, but this was not quite her whole reason for declining Trix's offer. She had been surprised by the force and the ambiguity of what she felt when the girl snuggled into her arms. It left a rankling afterthought behind it, too; a doubt whether, after all, it had been through the news-

paper that Trix had learned of George Burns' job in the air mail. She hadn't explicitly said so, Jennie remembered, and she felt the sting of contempt—the thing Henry Craven had talked about—in the prevarication, if this were what it was. Yet, could she be sure there was not, in herself, a background of jealousy for this suspicion to shine out against? One thing was plain, anyhow: the relation between her and Beatrice wanted an astringent treatment. And a good, thorough aeration; it was getting stuffy.

Henry Craven occurred to her as a possible ally in this project. She had often wished she might take him in as counselor upon some of the problems her young ward presented, but this had never struck her as quite feasible since she couldn't take him fully into her confidences without betraying both Joe's flying visit and Beatrice's escapade. He knew she had moved into Joe's flat for the rest of the term of his absence to keep Trix company, but she had volunteered no further explanations. What she wanted of him now, though, was not advice but action.

"I'm thinking of asking Henry Craven to dinner," she said to Beatrice one evening. "What do you say to that?"

The answer was not encouraging. "He's a poor fish. What do you want him to dinner for?"

"That's more or less his own idea of himself, but you're both wrong about him.—I like him a lot."

"His own idea!" Trix laughed contemptuously. "Why, he doesn't think ordinary air is fit for him to breathe.—Do you want him to improve me? So that I can learn to talk with an English accent? De-ah me!"

Jennie admitted, good-humoredly, that any one who pronounced "r's" and "a's" the way Henry did was justly suspect, but she insisted that in this case appearances were misleading. "He isn't—shy, exactly, but he's timid. He doesn't think people are interested in him. He thinks they're laughing at him when they aren't in the least. It's that sour sister of his that's done it to him, I think. He's been a lot jollier since she went away. You

were lucky to escape a summer with her. But he's as pleasant and friendly as you could want anybody to be."

"Has he been going around with you—since Margaret's been away?"

Jennie felt herself reddening with annoyance at the tone, which was neither friendly nor pleasant, but she answered evenly, "Oh, two or three times. A dinner or two, and a show. And I think I'd like to return the compliment."

"Oh, all right," Beatrice said sulkily. "I didn't know you were getting silly about him."

Jennie was able to laugh at that. "If I never get siller about any man than I am about Henry . . . But, Trix, I thought you liked him."

It was one straw too many. "Did he tell you that?" she demanded, with a blaze of temper. "Well, I'll tell you, once for all, I don't. I don't like him, nor his sister, nor his nice little cousin Dodo. I don't like his holy airs. Oh, he makes me sick!"

"Well, that's plain enough," Jennie commented. "All the same, I think I'll invite him to dinner with me."

"Here?"

"Naturally not, since you feel like that about him and this is your house. No, I'll take him to one of the hotels or gardens.—To-morrow night, I guess, if he's free."

The quarrel went no further that evening and Jennie hoped that a night's sleep would obliterate it. She even had an olive branch ready in the form of an offhand suggestion that Trix change her mind and join the party. But she was allowed to eat breakfast alone, and just before she left the flat for the office, the girl, looking like a young mænad, stopped her in the bedroom corridor.

"I'm to have a night off, am I?" she asked.

"Yes, if you want to put it like that," Jennie answered coolly. "That is unless Henry turns out to have something else to do. If that's the case, shall I telephone?"

"You mean, you don't care one damn what I do—while you're off with him?"

"Why, yes, it comes to about that. I mean, it's up to you, what you do with yourself to-night, just as it's been from the first. I'm not your keeper and I've never pretended to be."

This was, both reason and instinct assured her, the only possible line to take, with the situation developed to that point. (And whether she might have managed better than to let it get to that point was an academic question. She'd done the best she could, all along.) But she had a racking sort of day. And even the evening, cheered and, indescribably, comforted as it was by Henry's company, was punctuated by twinges of misgiving that hurt like a neuralgia.

They didn't talk very much about Beatrice, but he gave her one suggestion that she thanked him for. He'd asked what the girl did with her days. They must be pretty long, he thought, for any one with her energy. "It wouldn't surprise me," he ventured, "if she were to turn up an artistic talent of some sort. Joe's full of it, you know. Think of the music he manages to hear. And the pictures he buys—just because he can't resist them. She said something once that made me think she might take to sculpture or painting. But almost anything of the sort she could learn to do with her hands would be an—outlet for her. Joe's never seen that. He's dammed her up."

It was a promising suggestion, and one Jennie reproached herself for not having thought of earlier. If it weren't too late she'd offer it, still,—carefully concealing the source of it. But what chance had she, after that last furious warning that had been launched after her—of finding the girl.

She stuck it out with Henry exactly as if nothing had happened, and if he saw anything queer about her manner he forbore to notice it. She drove home, after she'd left him as usual at his own door, at her steady twenty-two miles an hour, put her car in the garage and let herself into the apartment exactly in her accustomed manner. But in her room, when she saw, propped against her pin-

cushion, a note addressed in Trix's familiar scrawl, she had to summon all her resolution for courage to open it.

"You can ask Anson what I've been doing this evening," was all it said. In an even mixture of relief and annoyance she undressed and went to bed.

She'd hardly switched off the light, however, before Beatrice came into her room. "I thought you'd either ask Anson or else come in and see if I was there," she said. "—I don't blame you for being mad at me, though. I don't see how you can stand me at all."

Jennie would have met this advance half-way if she could, but there was no emotion in her to respond to it. Trix came and sat on the edge of the bed and told how she'd done penance;—gone to bed supperless at seven o'clock, after having left orders that she wasn't to be called even to the telephone,—no matter who it was.

Joe would never have done a thing like that, Jennie noted, but she kept this reflection to herself. "The thing you need," she said, rousing herself unconsciously into her down-town manner, "is something to do. Some sort of real work to do. That's the main thing your father has been doing all his life. The rest is never anything but trimmings. And I hate to think what would happen to him if he should ever begin taking it easy. There's no point in your trying to earn money, I suppose. Probably he wouldn't want you to. But if there was something you could study . . . I was wondering about the Art Institute. Have you ever thought of that?"

Trix pounced unerringly. "I bet I know who did think of it. Henry Craven. It's just the sort of silly idea he'd have."

"Well, I didn't ask him for it," Jennie declared. "I didn't want to talk about you at all; nor think of you, any more than I could help.—You've given me a devil of a day, Trix, and that's the truth. What do you suppose I'd have said to Joe, if I'd come home and found you'd—flown the rails? His orders weren't to treat you the way I've done. I thought my way was better and I took a chance.

But it wasn't my own money I was speculating with. See?"

"Wasn't—any of it yours?" Trix asked pathetically.

"Oh, go along to bed!" Jennie commanded with a reluctant laugh. "Yes, of course, it was."

But this was cleanly the end of the sentimental phase of the relation. Trix didn't offer to resume her duties as chauffeur nor as ministrant at the breakfast table. After a day or two she did begin appearing at breakfast before Jennie left, but very brisk and businesslike and visibly occupied with her own affairs. It didn't seem to Jennie, either, that the girl was trying to tease her into asking what she was up to.

What seemed a little more like a deliberate stimulus to her curiosity was a letter Trix wrote, the evening of the first of these days, on Jennie's Corona, during the writing of which she asked Jennie how you spelled Pasadena. "You'd think I'd know how to spell it after all these years," she remarked with a laugh. "I've had to write it before, of course, but not when it mattered whether I spelled it right or not."

The knowledge that she was writing a letter to Pasadena of some special sort which had to be correctly spelled, would certainly have startled Joe, and it gave Jennie something to think about, but she asked no questions. Trix asked her for some money, too, in a bigger lump than she usually wanted, a hundred and fifty dollars, and Jennie wrote her the check, not feeling at all sure whether she was playing the part of a wise woman or a misguided fool.

Nothing untoward happened, however. Trix gave a standing order for her car at eight o'clock every morning and bolted her breakfast if necessary to enable her to leave at this hour. She drove herself; rarely, Anson volunteered, came home for lunch, and read, as a rule, in the evening in an absorption which contrasted strongly with her former restlessness; acted, Jennie thought, like a person who had really taken a line of her own.

After a week of this she revealed her mystery. "I

wanted to see whether I liked it or not before I said anything, that's all," she told Jennie. "—Why, I'm going to school. You see, when you told me I ought to do something—take lessons, you know, the only thing I could think of that I wanted to go on taking lessons in was swimming. That sounds kind of silly, I know, but it's so. There's a peach of a swimming teacher I'd heard of at the gym out in Evanston, so I went to see him about it. But it seems that the gym is part of Northwestern University, and except in summer he doesn't give lessons, only to students in the university.

"Any sort of student would do, though; you didn't have to study Latin or mathematics, so I went around to the office to see what kind of student I wanted to be. They've got a special school there, School of Speech, they call it, and I thought that would be pretty good for me. Everybody laughs at the way I talk, anyhow. So I planked down my hundred and fifty and wrote a letter to the High School at Pasadena to send word on that I'd really graduated,—and there I am. I like the school even better than the swimming. They teach you a lot of interesting things; acting, dancing and so on. Physical education, they call it. Things that are some earthly good to you! I'm going to be good at it, too.—Show 'em a few things! You watch."

This, at first blush, seemed to Jennie to solve all problems at a stroke. Her efforts and those of Henry Craven, to act as good Samaritans, hadn't amounted to much. It was the girl herself who, having fallen among thieves, had picked herself up, tied up her own wounds, and set herself upon her way.

There were still plenty of adverse chances to be reckoned with; a momentary discouragement, a succession of dull days, a wayward impulse to a lark, a flare of temper at an unimaginative touch of discipline, and the whole enterprise might go up in smoke. The child had no code, nor harness of habit to steady her through a bit of hard going.

Yet the point about which most of Jennie's apprehensions clustered was Joe's return. What line would he

take with his daughter? Would he be content to keep hands off, to leave her reticences unforced? Would it be possible for him to keep in mind how like him, at twenty, Beatrice was? Would Jennie help matters much by reminding him, scolding him, interfering? Mightn't he be jealous of her ascendancy over the girl?

No use worrying about it, of course! She'd have to wait and see what happened.

5

Meanwhile, it had got into October and Joe kept postponing his return from the Northwest. For weeks his reports had been full of material for enthusiasm. All the machinery for processing the flax was installed and in order. They had begun working the retted straw. It was going through without a hitch. There were some improvements in the direction of economy and simplification which could profitably be made, but they had turned up no serious defects.

Williamson and the Corbets had begun showing symptoms of an enlivened interest; took to dropping in at the office to see the samples which Joe was sending down, in greater bulk from week to week, for testing in the laboratory, and the finished products that came out of it. They had equipped the laboratory, by now, under the charge of a new technical man, as a mill with spinning machinery and looms; all the equivalents, on a reduced scale, for commercial linen manufacture—and the way the stuff came through these searching tests was well beyond the more conservative of their expectations;—not far short, indeed, of Joe's glowing prophecies.

But this was only the beginning of it. Interest in the new process, excitement over the prospect it offered of finding a fortune in the worthless straw of seed flax, was spreading over the Northwest country like a prairie fire. Groups of local capitalists were coming almost daily to visit the four mills. The organization of subsidiary companies was already getting beyond the talking

stage. Money, itself, was beginning to talk. Capital was being subscribed. By the time next year's crop came in, three states would be dotted with little four-thousand-ton mills producing raw linen under the Greer process.

To the financiers' startled reminder that their original program had not contemplated going as fast as this, Joe's replies were more confident and urgent than ever. Now was the time to strike. Everybody was ready; confidence was running high everywhere. If they bestirred themselves, seized the opportunity at the flood, they could repay the whole investment in the enterprise out of the first year's profits, and be on velvet thereafter. Joe was irresistible in the phase. He had taken the bit in his teeth, but it wasn't possible to say he was running wild. The figures and the facts, as well as the temper of the country, were going along with him. The great post-war boom was at its height during the summer and autumn of 1919.

And then, one day, when expectation was looking its rosiest, a letter came into the office that produced a panic. It was from a firm of patent lawyers, one of the best established and most formidable in the city, and it served formal warning that Joe's process in general and much of his machinery in particular, infringed the prior patents of a client. All manufacture and sale of linen under the Greer process would henceforth be carried on ~~at~~ the peril of the Greer Company.

Jennie, to whom the letter was brought as soon as it was opened, took a few minutes for intense reflection upon its startling contents before she carried it to Henry. For a month after Joe's flying visit she'd kept an alert eye for the "unexpected" thing she was instantly to communicate to Williamson—or, in his absence, Corbett, but nothing had turned up which was not foreseen by the adopted policy of the company and she had ceased looking for it. It had been, very likely, no more than one of Joe's many fancies that never took form. He seldom took the trouble to inform her of the abandonment of his projects; in many cases forgot he'd ever entertained them.

The sudden looming of trouble over the patents was certainly unexpected, but was it the unexpected thing he'd had in mind? Wasn't it, on its face, a thing he could not have foreseen, and one that for a dozen reasons he might wish to be informed of before Williamson and Corbett—or even Henry—knew it had arisen?

She found herself sitting with fists clenched and brows drawn down tight, and mechanically she relaxed and lighted herself a cigarette. Let her recall the circumstances in which Joe had instructed her. It had struck her as likely, she remembered, that he had made that secret trip to Chicago for the single purpose of saying that one thing; which meant, if this was a good guess, that he regarded it as too important, and too confidential, to be risked in a letter. What made it so important? Wouldn't she, naturally, in the face of anything as startling as this, take it to Henry at once? And wouldn't Henry be sure to tell John Williamson about it without delay? Of course!—Unless it happened to be a thing of such a complexion that her loyalty to Joe, and perhaps even Henry's, would incline them to keep quiet about it until he could be forewarned. Unless, in other words, it was a thing exactly like this! She let go a long expiration of relief, and carried the letter to Henry.

"We'd better try to telephone Joe, hadn't we?" he said, at the end of a moment of blank astonishment.
"That'll be quicker and surer than telegraphing."

"It might take us all day to find him," Jennie pointed out, "and when we did, there wouldn't be anything he could do but come home and talk it over with Mr. Williamson and Mr. Corbett. I think we ought to tell them first—one of them, anyway. Then, if they want Joe to come home for a conference, they can send for him. I don't think we ought to lose a minute letting them know about it."

"Unless," Henry argued dubiously, "you think it's something Joe would like to know about, first."

A luminous conviction broke over Jennie that she'd taken the right tack. "Oh, I'm sure it's nothing like that," she said.

The financiers decided that they did want Joe and he was sent for the next day, but they didn't waste time waiting for him. They retained, in addition to the firm that had drawn Joe's patents, a glittering specialist in the field, and they called Rodney Aldrich into consultation to cover any legal questions which might possibly lie outside the technical area of the case. By the time Joe arrived, three days later, the decks were cleared, if not for action at least for conference of the weightier sort.

Jennie tried to make an opportunity for a talk with him before the first meeting took place but did not succeed in bringing it about. She got a good look at him, which told her nothing, a painfully vigorous handshake, answered his, "You and Trix getting on all right?" with an affirmative nod, and by that time the other conferees were straggling into the room. Everything else, including any sort of intimation whether or not she'd done right in this present business, had to stand over.

The greeting between him and John Williamson was worth watching; in form it was friendly enough, but both men bristled at it. She wondered, suddenly, as they took their places, whether this move might not have originated in the banker's camp, the first in the campaign which Joe had prophesied would be launched against him. It was his unconcealed wariness, his poker face, that suggested this surprising idea. They'd all be able to see that he suspected something.

His disposition, at the outset, was to minimize the danger from the threatened attack, though he never tried to deny that it deserved to be considered seriously. He didn't believe any of the mechanical infringements amounted to a damn. If there were any coincidences he could design around them. If their more basic claims showed interferences, his offhand advice would be to go ahead and let the other side worry. The Lord knew that,

with the mess the patent situation was in in the United States, nobody with capital behind him need hesitate about infringing to his heart's content, even in a clear case. And no case could remain clear very long, while a bunch of Federal judges with less mechanical knowledge or instinct than an average boy of twelve had the deciding of it. Start two units to decide the same question in two jurisdictions and you had a good chance to get two diametrically opposed decisions—equally authoritative. As it looked to Joe, the important thing to look into was not the merit of their opponent's claims, but his motives and the extent of his financial resources; in other words, how hard it would be, and how long it would take, to tire him out.

This was, crudely, about the line Jennie would have expected the financiers to take, but she saw that, put as it was, they didn't find it palatable. Aldrich was staring out the window, his fingers drumming the table; Williamson drawing meaningless nervous designs on a scratch pad. It was Corbett who answered, the others mutely signifying approval while he spoke.

They wouldn't for one moment consider an act of highway robbery, even if their immunity were as great as Greer seemed to think it was. But there were a good many cases, on recent record, where powerful corporations had attempted to follow this course and had very justly been compelled to reimburse their intended victims to the tune, sometimes, of millions. This, however, was beside the mark. If they had taken—innocently, he assumed—ideas or processes which were the patented property of some one else, rich or poor, they'd pay him what those ideas were fairly worth. Offer to pay, at least. Of course, if the patentee had exorbitant notions of their value, refused to listen to reason, tried to hold them up, why then the tactics Mr. Greer had outlined would have his full approval. But obviously, the first thing to settle was the purely technical question as to the merit and the value—including the nuisance value—of their opponent's invention.

Joe agreed at once. He hadn't meant to say he didn't favor taking up the technical question first. He had a very lively personal interest in it, if only for the purpose of finding out why their own investigation of the files, his search, and the independent one which Corbett and Williamson had had made, had failed to turn up this alleged interference.

Corbett's patent lawyer made an openly apologetic explanation of this. The rival process was one of an enormous freak class for the industrial utilization of corn-stalks. The file-wrapper and contents had had a cursory examination, but the serious claims were buried under a mass of others so fantastic that their purport hadn't been detected.

Joe let off one of his characteristic explosions at this point. He doubted if there were a dozen men in the country who could be trusted to read a blue-print properly. To a decently educated engineer the purport of any diagram ought to be as instantly apparent as the purport of the seven of spades. "They blunder them out," he fumed, "like children mispronouncing hard words! Let's have a look at the stuff," he concluded. "You've got it here, haven't you? I don't believe, yet, that there's anything in it."

But it soon became plain to Jennie—and to the others, she couldn't but suppose—that this opinion of his was seriously shaken by the diagrams and descriptions that were spread before him. He studied them with deepening seriousness, his dark face now intent, now abstracted, now illuminated by a gleam of rueful appreciation. At last, with a sigh, he pushed them away from him. "There's no use detaining you gentlemen any longer to-day," he said. "I shall want to put in a night's work on this before I shall have an opinion that's worth giving. Offhand, some of it looks good. I hope it isn't so good as it looks. There are some minor points where his stuff is better than mine, obviously; and one or two that aren't so damned minor. Anyhow, by to-morrow morning I'll be able to

tell you pretty near what we're up against. Will eleven o'clock suit everybody?"

Jennie lingered after the rest had gone. She hoped for a sign; not a detailed explication of his mind—it wasn't like Joe, in the heat of battle, to indulge his lieutenants so far—but a burst of profanity, or the gleam of a grin, from which she could draw her own conclusions whether or not this thing was a trap, and, if a trap, of whose setting; whether, first of all, she'd done right in treating it as the "unexpected" thing he'd forewarned her of. But she got nothing of the sort. His abstraction didn't lift.

He smiled, presently, and nodded her to a chair. "Let's hear all about things," he commanded.

"Business or personal?" she asked.

"Business, hell! How've things been going at home? What's the girl been doing with herself? Giving you any trouble? You've been damn uncommunicative, seems to me. I don't believe you've written me about her, once."

"No, I haven't," she began, but he had unhooked his telephone and she waited to see what he was going to do. He called the number of his flat and flung Jennie an explanation while he waited.

"I'll just say hello to Trix, now," he said. "Get her to come down here to dinner with me, I guess. I can leave this mess long enough for that. Wish I didn't have to work all night."

"I don't believe you'll find her there as early as this," Jennie remarked with a look at her watch. "She spoke of waiting for you, but I couldn't tell her when you were coming exactly, so she decided not to."

"If she isn't at home, where is she?" he asked, but got his connection before she could answer. "Tell her to call me up at my office the minute she comes in," he ordered, and hung up. "You know where she is, don't you?" he shot at Jennie.

"Not exactly," she admitted. "Of course that means I don't really know at all. I haven't kept track of her

like that; haven't tried to.—I'd better tell you from the beginning. The reason I didn't write to you about her was because I promised her I wouldn't. And I promised, at the same time, not to ask her any questions, nor to question any one else about her. That was about three days after you left, when I saw that anything else would be perfectly hopeless."

"That's a damned funny way of carrying out my instructions," he commented.

"I wasn't trying to carry out your instructions. I never told you I would. I said I'd do the best I could for the girl, and I've done it my own way. It wasn't by being a spy, or a governess, or any of the things a girl like Trix would be sure to hate. And it's worked, Joe.—No, you give me a chance to tell you about it!"—He relinquished the intended interruption with no very good grace and sat back in his chair again.

Against the gloomy abstraction of his look she found it hard to hit upon the beginning she wanted for her story. She plunged, finally, into the middle of it. "She's going to school, Joe. Up in Northwestern University. It was her own idea from the start. She picked out what she wanted, registered and paid her tuition; wrote out to Pasadena for her certificate from the high school—all before she told me a thing about it. She's working hard, and she's happy at it. She drives off at eight o'clock every morning as regular as the clock, and what with some of the extra things she's taking—swimming lessons and all—she's hardly ever home much before dinner. And she studies at night. She's been doing it now for nearly a month."

"What's she studying?" he asked, and seemed unfavorably impressed by the list Jennie endeavored to furnish him with. "What sort of reports does she get?" Jennie had seen none; no, not even of attendance. What were her teachers like? The swimming teacher, for instance? Had Jennie talked with any of them?—No, she hadn't. The swimming teacher was supposed to be the

best man at it in this part of the country. At least, so Beatrice regarded him.

"She admits he's a man, does she? Look here, Jennie! How do you know she's doing anything but swimming? How do you know she's going to school at all? How do you know anything except that she drives off in the car every morning—by herself, I suppose—and stays away all day? How do you know she isn't running with Ware and his lot? Or with George Burns, for that matter? She may be picking him up on some drug-store corner every other afternoon."

"She may," Jennie admitted. "I haven't any alibi for her. But she doesn't act, to me, as if that was the sort of thing she was doing. She doesn't have to lie to me and she tells me a different story. She's made friends with me, you see. Make friends with her, yourself, and then see what you think."

"Make friends with her!" he cried, deeply affronted. "Why, my God, Jennie, I love that child as I never loved anything before in the world. But that wasn't enough to keep her safe. She needs somebody to watch her. I left that job to you.—And it seems to me you've fallen down on it.

"I'm not blaming you," he added, misreading her gesture of despair over his wrong-headedness. "She doesn't mean much to you, compared to what she means to me. You can afford to take chances. But I can't. Not after that night Burns brought her home. She'd been out all the night before, Jennie, with that rotten drunken gang. Anything could have happened to her."

"You promised to let that be bygones," she reminded him.

"And I will," he asserted, "as far as she's concerned. I'll never speak of it again to her. Never ask her a question. But I can't help thinking about it, can I? Wondering what did happen to her? She swore she was all right. Nothing's happened since—has there—to make you think . . ."

"For God's sake, Joe," she broke in upon him, "drop it! You're all wrong. You're talking like a sentimental idiot. If you take that line with her when you see her, you'll do her a lot more harm, yourself, than was done her that night—even supposing she did lose her innocence!"

His only answer was an incredulous stare.

"All right," she went on; "be as shocked as you like! I mean you to be. I'm trying to wake you up. Innocence is a good thing to have, but it isn't the only thing in the world. You'd lost yours long before you were as old as she is. In more ways than you mean about her. You'd run amuck. You'd got down, you've often told me, to the edge of the gutter. You're proud of it, too! Because of the way you built yourself up from there. By yourself. Without any help from anybody."

"Well, she's like you. You've said that yourself, but I told you you'd never be able to remember it. She's got to find things out for herself, even if she gets hurt, now and then, doing it. Nobody can help her unless they begin by trusting her to find her own way. And if she sees that you don't;—finds you watching her and spying on her—it'll do her more harm than any drunken lover could do her at the end of a joy-ride. I mean that, Joe; literally."

His only answer, for the moment, was to say that he wouldn't have believed a woman—a good woman—could have talked like that.

She uttered a mirthless laugh. "I don't believe you know much about good women. I doubt if you know one when you see one."

"I'm not going north again," he said, after a heavy silence. "There were a few things I wanted to finish up but they can stand over. I've got a job here, I can see that. I couldn't expect anybody else to do it for me. She's my daughter, that's the difference. I'm going to look after her my own way. I don't mean to spy on her. She won't know I'm watching or asking questions. But I'm going to know!"

"She'll see through you like so much glass," Jennie

predicted bitterly. "She hasn't got your wits for nothing. But she's your daughter, as you say."

The note of finality in her voice made him look up at her quickly, with another assurance that he didn't blame her for seeing the thing the way she had nor for acting according to her lights. He hoped she'd go on giving him advice about the girl, helping where she could. Above all, he hoped she'd stay on with them in the flat.

But this she wouldn't consider. "Two people trying to do the same thing in opposite ways are sure to make a mess of it—even if either one of them could have done it alone. No, I'll pull out, Joe, and leave the wheel to you.—Of course I'm not hurt about it! It'll seem pretty good, I tell you, to be back in my old joint again. When you've been a hermit as long as I have, you sort of need to be by yourself."

She may, at the moment, have talked herself into a half belief that this was true, but it was not a conviction with stamina enough to last out her first evening alone in her flat. She was miserably lonely. She wanted Trix, ranging in, hugging her at haphazard, sprawling on the chair-arm or the rug, talking neither very wisely nor very wittily, at random, yawning, fondling her shoulder or her knee for a moment with a careless hand, and saying she was going to bed. Naive, pathetic, lovely, young, just beginning to find herself! What right had Joe to come trampling into this little garden, just because a momentary casual act of his, forgotten for twenty years, had begotten her! *His* daughter, was she?

6

Their conferences over the patent situation endured for days. The lawyers studied Joe's report with grave attention and presented a report of their own. To the bored laymen sitting round the table each of these reports made the situation the more labyrinthine. The alleged infringements raised curious questions of law as well as of fact. Rodney Aldrich enthusiastically declared

it a fascinating problem—a dictum which, coming from him, made the others of them shudder.

John Williamson put an end to this phase of the discussion by declaring that if their own experts were as dubious as all this, it was clear the other side had better be bought off without further delay. All the non-technical people around the table agreed with him, and, with this, the discussion shifted to the question of tactics. John was in favor of a cold offer, liberal enough to be attractive, but accompanied by the stiffest bluff they could make that the alternative to its acceptance was a fight to the finish.

"Take time to look 'em up, first," Joe insisted. "You don't know yet what'll *be* attractive to them. My experience is that if a man expects twenty-five dollars and you offer him two hundred he'll refuse it and sue you for fifty thousand." This was sound observation, they all agreed.

"Get a line on the inventor himself," Joe went on. "Find out who's backing him. I'll tell you frankly that I've taken measures, on my own account, to get a line on him, and until I'm satisfied that my line goes all the way round and ties in a knot, I won't vote for paying him a cent." (Did he suspect, Jennie wondered, that this inventor was a pawn in John Williamson's game? There was an edge in his voice which suggested he did.) "If he's what he looks like, so far, we can buy him up so cheap we'll feel foolish."

But it turned out that Joe was wrong in that. The inventor was skilfully stalked, sounded out, impressed, and eventually was offered the sum in cold cash which, after so much deliberation, had been agreed upon. The offer, through his attorneys, was instantly rejected and a counter-proposal submitted which consternated the directors. The cash price of the patents was prohibitive, fantastic, and the alternative offer was a substantial block of stock in the Greer company. The inventor believed that the Greer process, improved by his own, had enormous possi-

bilities. He wished to be in on it. He had deliberately put his cash price at a prohibitive figure because the stock was what he really wanted.

Joe, from the moment this offer was made, favored rejecting both alternatives of it, and fighting it out with the idiot through the courts. The question was not worth debating, and anybody who saw a need for debating it was either lacking in courage—or had his own fish to fry.

He was called sharply to order for this insinuation, and Jennie was unhappily aware that the explosion had not furthered his cause. It might have made some impression on Williamson, she thought, but never on men like Corbett and Crawford. Their jaws set ominously over it. It was still the sense of the directors that an arrangement should be made. Crawford made a formal motion that the settlement be made, when it was made, in stock.

This put Joe in a corner. Real danger always quieted him, and his argument though forcible was low-voiced and conciliatory. The fundamental difficulty about organizing this company, he pointed out, had been over the question of control. He had felt at first, that since he was putting his whole fortune into the company and was to be its technical head, he was entitled to full control. It had been with the greatest reluctance that he had consented to a divided control, an even fifty per cent. in his hand and fifty in the hands of the associates. He had relied upon a gentleman's agreement that this balance should not be disturbed by the issuance of treasury stock. He felt that the payment of the inventor in this stock was dangerous to his interests as likely to disturb that balance. It would be a much easier matter for Williamson, Corbett and Crawford, or their friends, to possess themselves of that stock, than it would be for him. He urged, therefore, in the interest of fair play, that the cash price, or rather, the best compromise they could make on a cash basis, be accepted.

"Question," Corbett murmured, when they had heard him in silence to the end. But Frank Crawford, after a

glance down the table at Henry Craven's troubled face, made a little speech of reassurance. The agreement was still a gentlemen's agreement, and there was no disposition on the part of any one to violate it. The control had from the first been ambiguous and it would be no more so after the stock sale had been made. There was no reason to believe that the inventor was not entirely disinterested. Crawford was voting for a stock payment both because he did not wish the company's financial resources depleted and because he did wish the personnel strengthened, as he believed it would be by the enlistment of a man whose talents, as an inventor, had been so highly praised by their president.

The vote was then taken and the motion carried, Joe, Jennie and Nathan voting against it. It was supported by Williamson, Corbett, Crawford—and, most unhappily, by Henry Craven. Joe shook hands with him after the meeting and told him not to feel bad about it. He'd acted in accordance with the clear understanding under which he'd been elected. He hadn't the heart to stay around, however, to talk it out with Joe and Jennie, and left with John Williamson.

Jennie, tired out and thoroughly dispirited, hadn't much wanted to stay and talk it out, either, but she had been detained by an imperative signal from Joe. She stood looking out the window over the lake while she waited for the room to clear. When the door had shut for the last time, she turned with what began as a smile of encouragement for her defeated boss. But it ended with a gasp.

"Joe!" she cried. He was gazing after John Williamson's back, with his most brilliant grin.

"We've got 'em, Jennie! We've got 'em by the short hairs!"

"Was this what you were working for, all along? But Joe, why?"

"Good lord, yes! Didn't you see it? I hoped you wouldn't, because it made your face safer, but I didn't

suppose I could get by with you. I'm pretty good when I can do that."

"I don't see, yet," she confessed, "what you've got out of it, unless this inventor you were so anxious to have them look up is somebody you—own, more or less."

"Hell!" said Joe. "I *am* the inventor. Patented the whole thing myself—as an infringement—before I patented the others. Corn-stalks was a damn good idea, wasn't it. They might have found the thing before they went in and gummed the whole game. But they didn't, Jennie.—Do you think I'd go into business with that bunch without something up my sleeve?"

"That stock will stay right where it is, see, until they try to pull their stuff. I may not have to show down even then, if I can get Henry. I believe I could have got him to-day if I'd wanted him. I could only use him oncee, of course.

"Been feeling sorry for the old man, have you? Well, next time you wait. We've got 'em by the short hairs, Jennie, and when we get ready, they're going to yelp!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRUE LOVE

1

JOE's misgivings about the use Beatrice had been making of her liberty was warranted. She had picked up George Burns on a drug-store corner more than once, and though this did not happen as often as her father, with deliberate exaggeration, had suggested to Jennie, the bond between the pair was stronger than anything his speculations ran to. Within a month of her coming to Chicago, there had been an episode which Trix herself recognized as important.

Until this happened she had romanticized about her chauffeur in the half-amused, half-credulous vein, natural to one in whose cultural background the movies were so important a factor. The solid circumstantial facts of her transplanting from her mother's household to her father's seemed unreal enough to justify her in a day-dreaming projection of them. George Burns was in his middle twenties, strong, straight-standing, well-coordinated; he had carried over into his job as Greer's chauffeur a military neatness and smartness which he had learned in the army. His smoothly brushed hair had an ineradicable wave in it. He had an engaging smile and a pleasurable virile voice. The niceties of speech were beyond him, but to these, the girl's ear was not, at this time, sensitive.

She did not, of course, seriously believe that George was really a millionaire's son or the heir of a fabulously rich uncle; nor that he'd taken this humble job as a means of showing any one his true worth, or of finding some one who

would love him for himself alone, or of foiling the matrimonial machinations of some sordid mother or aunt. Yet he made a substantial peg upon which to hang idle romances of this general character.

According to her mood, her treatment of him veered capriciously; sometimes she was haughty and remote, the complete employer; sometimes, experimentally—and quite unsuccessfully—she tempted him; sometimes, since she really liked him, she forgot all her poses and treated him like a friend. He was, literally, for weeks, her only coeval companion, and for longer than that, the only one of them whose good-will she didn't more or less suspect.

This opening phase of their relation, after it had lasted about a month, was brought abruptly to an end. It was an especially fine day after three of rain, a jolly south wind blowing gustily drying the roads and fields and a sultry red sun "carrying water." They'd been cruising about hunting out some of the new forest preserves, Beatrice, of course, at the wheel.

She'd been in her friendliest mood with him at first, impudent, familiar, easily amused. She sat low in the half-reclining seat, her feet riding the clutch and brake pedals. The wind tousled her uncovered head and whipped her skirt about her knees. She had George find a cigarette for her in the pocket of her discarded pongee coat and strike matches for her, amid mutual charges of wilful clumsiness, until it was alight. She invited him to take off his stiff-visored cap as well as the military blouse, which must be horribly hot, and make himself comfortable; and when he refused she speculatively suggested as reasons that he was afraid of mussing his hair and that he hadn't any proper shirt on beneath the blouse; only a dicky.

Apart from his refusal to get out of uniform, though, he was not very ceremonious with her. He shouted, "Hey! Where you going?" when she steered the big car out of the road into a divergent cart-track.

"It's the way in," she explained with a nod toward a sign post; "why not?" But they were going faster than

it was written that any car could go over those humps and hollows and a series of heavy jolts supplied an answer. George reached over to her side and cut off the ignition.

"That's why," he said. "Better back out before you get any deeper in."

She sat up with a cold stare at him and started the motor again. "Whose car is this, anyway?" she asked. "Anybody given it to you? I told you I was going into those woods, and I am. It's a nice little woods—even if it would get a laugh out in California. And this road's the regular way in."

"It was never meant for a car like this," he said.

From his tone and the flush in his face she knew he was angry and, perversely, she added another shovelful to the fire. "I know what's the matter with you," she said with a short laugh. "You're afraid you'll have to wash. Getting spoiled and lazy. A little work won't hurt you a bit." He flared a brighter red but said nothing.

She was driving slowly, now, with all her skill and caution; both were needed. Presently she found herself on the bank of a sluggish little stream. The road, twisting down a shallow gully, led through it, a slippery rutted incline of clay, but the stream-bed itself, she saw, was paved in concrete.

"Look here, Trix!" he burst out, in the face, apparently, of a fully formed resolution not to speak again. "If you go across there you won't get out."

Once before, this afternoon, he'd called her that, unconsciously as now, and she, rather pleased than not, had ignored the slip. But this time, annoyed by the misgiving that he was right, she snatched the advantage it gave her. "You're forgetting yourself, Burns," she said, as insolently as she knew how. "When I want any advice of my servants, I ask for it."

It was still her program to make it up with him—after she should have put him completely in the wrong by emerging unscratched upon a hard road, somewhere. But the program couldn't be carried out, for the track, after a twist

or two among the trees on the farther bank, betrayed her by disappearing altogether in a morass. She tried to cut the car around but at the first attempt she backed into a tree and found she was wedged fast. Tears of vexation were too near her eyes to make it safe to chance a look into the chauffeur's set face.

"I'm going to get out and look for some may-apples," she said. "If you want to turn the car around you can. If you don't, you can wait till I come back."

She found neither the may-apples nor the better humored self-command which was really what she'd gone off to seek. She got thoroughly mired, scratched and torn by thorns, and horribly bitten by mosquitoes. She didn't know whether she was glad or sorry to find on her return that George had got the car around. She found him looking stonily at a crumpled mudguard. "You can drive," she told him meekly, as she got into the passenger's seat.

When they were back on the hard road she tried, non-committally, to make peace with him, exhibiting her rents, scratches and mosquito bites; but these unworded appeals for his sympathy were fruitless. Exasperated again by his silence, she said presently, "If you're afraid father'll fire you, or anything, for the mess you got the car into, you needn't worry. I'll tell him I did it.—Of course it was my fault, I suppose."

"I'm not worrying about getting fired," he said grimly. "I've already quit."

She was startled into betraying real consternation at this, but soon learned it was not an accomplished fact but a mere intention. He'd been trying, he said, for the past two or three days to get a chance to give Mr. Greer notice, but hadn't succeeded. He wanted to do it in a friendly way because Mr. Greer had always treated him white.

To get even with him for having startled her she laughed, skeptically. "For a minute, I thought you meant it."

"You can tell him, to-night," he retorted. "With or without two weeks' notice, just as he likes. It can't be too quick to suit me. And you can tell him why, too."

She said she didn't know why. "He pays you well enough, doesn't he?"

"You know why, all right," he said. "There's nobody in this world can treat me the way you do and get away with it."

"If you don't want to be treated like a servant, I don't see why you took this job," she grumbled.

"Like a servant!" he echoed. "I had two years of it in the army, from a lot of tin stampings they called officers. One minute they'd forget that was what they were, and get familiar with you, and then they'd remember and ride you for it. And you couldn't quit. You had to take all they wanted to give you. Well, the war's over and I'm through. If a person wants to treat their chauffeur like part of the machinery of the car, they won't hear any kick coming from me. But this being treated like old home folks for a while and then like a dog . . . Dog! Why, you wouldn't know *how* to treat a *good* dog."

"You've said enough," Trix told him furiously. "You've quit all right."

But at the end of ten silent miles she laid her hand upon his knee and said she was sorry. The more she liked people the more she was under the necessity, now and then, of getting them raging mad at her. She even did it to her father, sometimes. It was sort of like Fate, she forlornly supposed. She did like George. Old home folks was exactly how she felt about him. She didn't blame him for hating the job—which he was too good for—and she had acted like a pig and she didn't suppose he could forgive her.

Her hand had been caressing his knee all the while and at this point his driving got a bit wobbly, so with a little laugh, she suggested that he pull out at the side of the road to finish their talk.

She was luxuriating in penitence, of course, and the knowledge that he was deeply moved by it encouraged her to go all the further, but the feeling she overexpressed was nevertheless real. Fundamentally his attitude toward her

was loyal and chivalrous, and these were qualities she did not find elsewhere—not even in her father. She couldn't do without George Burns.

She was a little on guard with him the next time they went out together, for she had held his hand during the last part of their talk and she had cried when he'd told her that he'd stick whatever happened and would always be her faithful friend and servant. The thing couldn't go on upon this plane, of course.

She was relieved, and about equally disappointed, to find in him no disposition that it should. He was always the correct chauffeur when this was what she wanted him to be. He never pressed for confidences, let alone for endearments. He listened and advised her gravely when she talked to him about her new friends and the problems of conduct they presented.

By snatches, he told her a good deal about himself, and, so doing, dissipated all that was left of her romantic imaginings about him. He was no prince in disguise.

He had been adopted out of an orphanage when he was too young to remember it, by a well-to-do childless couple who lived in one of the smaller down-state cities. His adoptive father was proprietor of a machine-shop and a big garage and a dealer in automobiles. Had made good money at it.

As a little boy, George had been made much of;—nothing too good for him. But then the woman, contrary to earlier expectations, had had a baby of her own, and began developing a jealousy, more rancorous from year to year until it was almost insane, of the older boy. Every cent that was spent upon him came to seem to her a bare-faced robbery of their own child. She resented his schooling, the friends he made, his fun.

The husband was a well-meaning man and in the interest of common decency and justice combated his wife's notion as best he could, but his best was ineffectual. George quit school at fifteen and went to work in the garage, as floor boy, machinist's helper, and so on. This

made things more peaceful at home for a while, but the mother began professing the fear that his new rough companions and ways would corrupt the younger boy. Everything she could do, to emphasize a social distinction between the two, she did.

By the time he was eighteen George had had all he could stand of it and left for Chicago to make his own way. He'd always been able to earn a decent living and he'd never been without ambition to raise himself out of the artisan class. He had joined the Y. M. C. A. and was working at some of the technical courses they offered at night school when the draft got him.

In the army, just as in his earlier years, at home, he had felt himself the victim, Beatrice found, of invidious caste distinctions. He had made a good soldier, smart, steady, ambitious. So far as any relevant tests went, mental or physical, he was top-notch material for a flyer. But he wasn't a "college boy" and they never gave him a chance. He was a machinist and he had to be grateful for what crumbs of flying experience his pilots were good-natured enough to let him have.

Trix was a good enough democrat, academically at least, to take the view that this had been an outrage, and the two of them often discussed their common hatred of snobbery. It didn't often lead her to show any consideration for his comfort or convenience at the expense of her own, but it gave her a logical and meritorious basis for treating him as a social equal when she felt like doing so.

She drifted into the habit of bestowing small fugitive caresses upon him, patting his knee, stroking his hand. Sometimes when he was driving she snuggled close to him and rested her head on his shoulder. Her appetite for this grew by what it fed upon until she realized it was serious and tried to break it off. Often she'd be with him for hours without touching him but usually before the end of their ride she'd find herself doing it again. He never made any overt response though she was often made aware that he turned to iron in his effort not to do so.

He believed, evidently, that these were not amorous approaches on her part but mere innocent tokens of friendliness and good will.

She pretty well persuaded herself that this was what they were, though she never denied that they were silly and dangerous. His self-control piqued her, while she presumed upon it. If he would just break loose some time and try to make love to her she'd find it easy, she managed to believe, to repulse him indignantly, tell him he'd misunderstood her and "spoiled everything"—and, thereafter, let him alone. But in the luxurious day-dreams she sometimes indulged in, she imagined him as her lover.

There was no longer any glow of romance about the attraction he exerted upon her. She saw, cold and clear, the folly of falling in love with him and that this was what she was doing was a fact which five minutes of honest reflection could always force home to her. She evaded it when she could.

Her taking up with Lansing Ware and the "bunch" of ambiguous nomads his inclinations attracted him to, represented a deliberate effort on her part to break away from George Burns. Their recklessness, their boozy vulgarity, their pretended contempt for the gold-coast set whose manners they believed they imitated, all found a responsive echo in the cynical desperation of her prevalent mood, though there were moments when she loathed them all. Henry Craven, given a little more self-confidence and imagination, might have been an effectual rescuer. That Sunday afternoon he told Jennie MacArthur about was one of the critical angles in the course Beatrice steered that summer.

Angered by what she took to be his disdainful superiority to her new friends, she abandoned herself more recklessly than before to their ways. There was nothing repressive about them, anyhow. They had no polite horror of scenes. When they quarreled they threatened suicide or murder and their reconciliations were equally unrestrained.

Yet even to Trix's youthful inexperience, the reality of all this was suspect. They weren't so prosperous as they pretended to be, nor so self-assured, nor so primitive—nor even so bad.

They were not, either, an escape from George Burns. They'd most likely have guessed some sort of scandalous attachment between the girl and her father's chauffeur even if no such thing had existed. The discovery, soon made, that it actually did exist was a succulent morsel exactly to their taste. They treated it sentimentally, jocularly, melodramatically, but whatever color they gave it, it was always kept in the foreground of Beatrice's consciousness. The two were sometimes kept apart, sometimes thrown together and speculation was unbridled as to the use they made of their opportunities.

George's solid virtues, his self-control and loyalty foremost among them, acquired a certain splendor by contrast with all this fustian. He showed her openly the contempt in which he held these "rich bums" she had made friends with and he often begged her to let them alone, but he never made her feel, even during her participation in their least creditable goings-on, that she was, in his eyes, tarred with the same stick. Indeed, his confidence in her fundamental innocence seemed to grow with the need he felt of defending it. And that this somewhat shop-worn innocence of hers was still, technically at least, intact on the day he so satisfactorily licked Lansing Ware was due, primarily perhaps, just to this impregnable faith of his and her consciousness of it.

On the third day after his dismissal Trix, with an elaboration of clandestine contrivance, met him and had a long talk with him. She'd chosen a rendezvous, unhappily, upon the Municipal Pier, a place packed that hot August day with banana-munching trippers and resonant with brass bands and the chant of barkers for the quarter-hourly excursions to Lincoln Park.

She'd come off without the car,—though Jennie had by this time licensed her use of it,—partly from a fear of

being spied upon and partly from an idea that she might never go back at all to her father's house. There was no hope of any real happiness for her there after what had happened. She knew, now, that she loved George and if her distorted memories could be trusted she'd avowed the fact to him during their drive home from Glencoe. Why shouldn't they, then, run off to-day to Milwaukee or somewhere and get married? If he asked her to, she would. If he didn't, she thought perhaps she'd ask him.

But the mere sight of him was disconcerting. She'd never seen him before in an ordinary straw hat and regular civilian clothes, and a certain air which she'd regarded as inseparable from him was gone. It would be a little too much to say that he looked cheap but he would never, for a fact, have served, like this, as lay figure to hang romances about a disguised prince upon. She suspected, too, that she had somewhat impaired herself with him, arriving afoot, hot and flushed and flecked with soot from the vomiting funnels of the little excursion steamers.

The pair found a corner where they could sit in the shade. The fact that they loved each other got itself declared and accepted as a basis almost at once. He put his arm around her—half of the paired people out here were linked that way—and during a moment of fortuitous privacy they kissed.

But the feel of the adventure was pedestrian, not aerial. George pointed out that he hadn't a job, and, he added with a manner which struck her as a little unnatural, practically no money. She had nearly four hundred dollars of her own, she said,—with her; but he told her hotly, that, when they ran away to get married, it wouldn't be upon her money that they did it. She didn't contest the point; lacked the spirit to do it, somehow.

Anyway, he went on to say, they'd have to come down, eventually, to living on what he could earn. Mr. Greer would do nothing for them, even in the way of making an opening for him. Forlornly she conceded this, too. She

knew how implacable her father's resentments were, though she was rather surprised that her lover should see so clearly.

If they'd been sitting, while they had this talk, in the roadster, skimming along a white ribbon of road, or pulled up in the shade of some secluded lane, she might have been able to romanticize the idea of poverty with her lover and insist upon embracing it. A tiny cottage, a single room, anything that sheltered the pair of them together would be enough.

But out here on the pier this couldn't be done. There were too many object lessons all about. Shrill children carrying all-day suckers on sticks, harassed mothers, a sheepish father here and there, peremptory denials of any more pennies for the slot-machines;—this was pleasure! This was a red letter day!

Her courage wasn't equal to it, nor his, either, the truth was. For the present they'd have to give it up. If a piece of luck came George's way . . . He had a plan in mind but wouldn't tell her now what it was.

They exchanged some promises, that day; she, never to have anything more to do with Ware or his bunch, or any one like them, and to quit drinking—as he had done, absolutely, two months before; he, never to take another job as chauffeur but stick it out for something that looked toward the future; and not to lose himself where she couldn't find him—if she needed him.

They parted mournfully enough, but comforted somewhat by the meeting, for all that. He'd never distrust her again, he said, whatever happened. He had thought when her father fired him, that night on the way to the train, that she might have thrown him over—made him the goat.

"I never told him anything—about you," Trix asserted.
"How do you suppose he found out?"

It must have been Miss MacArthur, then. George had talked to her. He'd had so much on his chest that night that he'd had to blow off to somebody. He'd realized he

was giving himself away more or less, but had thought Jennie too good a friend to take advantage. So the warmest emotion Trix went home with that afternoon, was a lively hatred of Jennie.

This was short-lived, of course, for it was on that very evening that Jennie offered her treaty and won a victory. This might, it is easy to believe, have been much more complete than it turned out to be; for, after all, Jennie failed.

Her failure was due to a defect rather characteristic of her sex—though it is one they are not often charged with. She was too logical. She had taken a good line with the girl in promising to ask no questions and claim no privileges, even those of affection, but she clung to this line with a blind consistency when a readier obedience to her own instincts would have led her to abandon it.

For a while after she had adopted Jennie as her friend, Trix thought of George Burns—though still tenderly and sometimes passionately—as a danger from which she had been saved. Jennie gave her a new, and much needed, emotional outlet, and for those first weeks the novelty made this enough. But the time soon came when she wanted more. She wanted Jennie to ask questions and make demands, for the simple reassurance that Jennie cared. She wanted love. She offered it and she felt that the offer was repulsed.

So George regained his place in her reveries, and, when these would no longer serve a need sometimes as urgent as hunger, she began having little talks with him over the telephone, made more difficult and more exciting by an elaboration of devices against detection—which she half hoped Jennie would solve.

She saw him, for the first time since their parting, the day she read in the paper of his having got a job as pilot in the air mail service. They had an afternoon together, in the car again, revisiting some old haunts of theirs, but despite the romantic accessories, it was not a very happy time. He pressed her hotly now to marry him and said

some pretty bitter things when she refused to promise anything. Wasn't the job good enough to suit her? He got a base pay of fifty a week and five cents a mile. On the Cleveland run this figured nearly fifty a week more. And between round trips, one day each way, he had two days off. If she wouldn't take him at that . . .

"I couldn't stand it, just waiting. You'd be away half the nights, even." They both thought, when they parted that day, that it was the end of everything.

Going to school, though it represented at first nothing more than a random attempt to escape from the tyranny of her need of him, afforded her, presently, a more hopeful idea. Most of her fellow students, she found, were not here to pass the time nor even to improve themselves, but with the sharply defined aim of learning to earn themselves a living. Teachers, most of them professedly meant to be, professional entertainers, a few more; some of the boldest avowed a hope of becoming real actors, on the stage. Trix confidently appraised herself as superior to any of them, harder of will, quicker of mind, more attractive of person. Anything they could hope to do, she could. Secure in her ability to pay her own way, she could have George, she thought, on any terms she liked.

He wasn't very sympathetic toward this idea when she broached it to him; they were always on the edge of quarreling over it, and she was none too confident of it herself. Indeed, there was nothing very confident or clear about her life, within or without, during the weeks that intervened between her father's disastrous flying visit in August and his final return late in October. Her wishes and her dreams contradicted each other and frequently themselves, and her actions followed as best they could through the maze.

Before Joe took up his post as sentry, determined, as he said, to know, she had drifted into a *modus vivendi* with her lover. She saw him once during each of his off-duty periods in Chicago, for as long as she could safely give him, usually in the afternoon. In fine weather, they drove

out into the country; for bad days they found various ignoble and humiliating hiding-places in town. They didn't plan much nor hope for much. They merely drifted, dangerously they both knew, compromising as best they could with the desire that held them in the grip of its great disinterested hand.

2

Beatrice, as Jennie had prophesied she would, saw through her father's intention like so much glass. Even during their first dinner together down-town he asked enough innocent-seeming questions to put her thoroughly on guard.

She'd looked forward to his coming, during the three days since she'd known he was expected, with a very mixed lot of anticipations. One of these, incredulously indulged now and then, had been a picture of him finding her waiting in the library, as he had found her the first time, picking her up in his arms—as he had not done that time—and sitting down in the big easy chair with her in his lap. She'd wondered whether she'd feel, if he did that, a resurgence of that sense of being swallowed up in his comprehensive embrace, of having found harbor there, from doubts and from desires.

Probably it would not have worked out like that even if he had come home and there had been no restaurant table to make it impossible. Even their first kiss, enthusiastic as it had been, had left her unmoved. She had appraised its visible effect upon him simply as an advantage to her—a good card in her hand.

At dinner, she threw out, pathetically, the supposition that he'd be going away again in a day or two, after having stayed just long enough to make her homesick.

"I don't think I'll go back at all," he answered, offhand. "I'd meant to clean up a few things before I came away for good, but as things turn out, I guess they need me more at this end. If I do find I have to run up there again, it will only be for a few days.—What would you say to coming along?"

"Oh, dad, that would be great!" she cried, beaming upon him and reaching out to pat his hand. "I've always been perfectly crazy to travel with you. Anywhere!"

He meant to keep as close watch as that, did he?

"How about your school, though?" he asked. "Do you suppose they'll let you off for a week?"

There might be a trap here, either way; he might be angling for an admission that the school had been a mere excuse for evading Jennie, or he might be waiting to see whether she'd use it with him as a reason why she couldn't leave town when he did.

"I'd forgotten all about school," she told him with a fine air of candor. "Oh, but of course they'd let me off to go somewhere with you. I want you to come out," she added, "the very first day you can, and see what it's like. And see what they think about me, too. Mother never would believe the marks I'm getting. How about to-morrow?"—She feared that sounded a bit overdone.—"Oh, I know you wouldn't be working to-night unless you were going to be busy to-morrow. But as soon as you can, anyway."

He nodded. "Three or four days will see us through this mess. I'll be tied down every minute of the time, till then. Day and night, most likely. Leave you more alone than ever, since Jennie's going back to her own flat."

"And a darned good time for me to be careful," Trix reflected.

"But after that, I'm going to take it easy for a while, and we'll play around together. How does that strike you?"

She said it would be wonderful but she didn't believe it would ever happen. He'd made promises like this before.

As they were leaving the restaurant—early, since it was necessary for him to get back to work—he asked her how the new chauffeur was doing. "All right," she told him coolly. "He doesn't drive as well as George did, but he keeps the cars nicer." The implausibility of her indif-

ference drew from him a searching look of overt suspicion. She returned it with a challenging stare.

The note between them was not always so hostile as that. During the month that elapsed before the final explosion they were together more than ever before and often, for hours and even days on end, the surface they presented each other was one of unbroken confidence and tenderness. Trix sometimes believed in the honesty of her own,—managed to think she loved him as well as ever,—but she never wholly trusted him. She was fully conscious of his charm. She was aware that she enjoyed his society as she never enjoyed, except in the one special way, that of her lover, yet the effect of this was only to intensify her wariness with him. And she knew, all the while, that the end would have to come, some time.

Her knowledge that she was being watched—spied upon—was fortified by evidence, though the items of it were too minute to be reported; a glance at the superscription of a letter, the too casual tone of a question, an explanation a little too circumstantial of his plans for the day, an occasional something queer about a telephone call.

She took a rather cruel pleasure, though it wasn't entirely wanton, in feeding his suspicion with false clues, making small mysteries of nothing. She didn't believe he was on the main trail. Ware, whom she hadn't seen since his licking, and some of his associates were still in her father's thoughts, and he seemed uneasy, too, about some of the new friends she had made at school. These suspicions of his, she deliberately inflamed.

The victories were not all with her, however. He was a strategist, too. Within a week of his return, he maneuvered her out of half her liberty by appropriating the roadster to his own use. The closed car was at her disposal but since it was a limousine the chauffeur naturally went with it, and this unescapable social convention made it useless for the most important of her purposes. Yet in the teeth of the bleak autumnal weather she couldn't avow a preference for the open car.

In another way, too, the weather helped force the situation. When Joe finally got round to going north again, about the middle of November, there was no possibility of giving the journey the color of a pleasure outing for Trix. He put his command that she go with him in the form of an invitation but didn't try, beyond this, to disguise the fact that he was taking her with him because he was afraid to leave her at home alone. He flushed under the sting of her laugh and the savage sarcasm of her, "What a wonderful time we'll have!" But he offered no explanation and asked none.

During the whole ten days the journey lasted, storms and the mud kept her virtually a prisoner in a succession of small hotels. She wrote long daily letters to George Burns while her father was away about his business and in the evening when he came back she entertained him with a sulky silence, varied sometimes by a spiritless acquiescence in a suggested movie show or by a pretended absorption in a magazine. Before they returned they had worn the situation down to its last shred of tolerability.

They got into town on the morning of the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. The closed car was waiting for them but Joe declined to share it with her, even as far as the office, and bolted into a taxi. He had been savagely restless, she'd noted, over his breakfast and behind his newspaper. She had the chauffeur drive her to Field's and dismissed him there, saying she didn't know how long her shopping would take and that she would come home by bus when she had finished.

The one thought in her mind was to get to George as quickly as she could. She had figured this as one of his off days and was sure, having written she was getting home to-day, that he would be waiting at his boarding-house to hear from her. The fortnight since she'd seen him seemed a year.

She was angrily incredulous of the voice—that of a boarding-house slavey—which informed her that Mr. Burns was out, and after this assurance had been rammed home to

her there was a black moment or two when she turned her wrath upon her lover. Then it occurred to her that he might be the victim of a change in his timetable and, calling up the office of the superintendent of the air mail, she learned that this was true. Pilot Burns had taken out the Cleveland mail that morning. He'd be returning with it to-morrow, some time around noon.

It was an unbearably fine day to be deprived of him, mild and clear; they could have spent it in the open. And to-morrow was Thanksgiving, a holiday, which would mean that her father wouldn't let her out of his sight all day.

A panicky foreboding took possession of her, that she might not again be allowed even such qualified liberty as she enjoyed to-day. She had heard of sanitoriums for nerve and brain cases where a person could be shut up. Wasn't her father, angry as he would be if ever he found out about George, just the sort of person to try a thing like that—and get away with it? She ought to be prepared to bolt to George and marry him at a moment's notice, any time.

In the train of this half-serious notion she spent the rest of the morning buying a traveling bag and equipping it with a complete outfit for the emergency she foresaw, including suit, hat and shoes, all inconspicuous and serviceable.

She deposited this "iron ration" in the care of the head porter in one of the smaller down-town hotels, a man who had already served as her ally in one or two small matters. It was to be kept till called for, no matter when, to-morrow or next year. Now if she quarreled with her father in the middle of the night or during an evening party she couldn't be kept prisoner by a lack of clothes.

Her afternoon's entertainment consisted in looking at furnished rooms which had been advertised for light house-keeping. To the landladies she saw, she gave her name as Mrs. George Burns and described herself as the wife of one of the mail aviators. She got a good deal of emotional

stimulus out of this, for they were without exception interested and in one case deeply sympathetic; Mrs. Henderson didn't see how she could endure the suspense of knowing her husband might be killed any day. Any day, *absolutely!* And Fridays! She hoped Mr. Burns never had to fly on Friday!

The danger never had worried Beatrice very much; it existed, of course—for every one but George. But it was comforting to be cried over and made a heroine of, and she stayed the better part of an hour in the nice little apartment Mrs. Henderson had to let. She got a thrill, too, from the domestic intimacies the place suggested. It consisted of a sitting-room with a double bed in an alcove, a bathroom and a closet equipped as a kitchenette. She almost hired the place outright, and she left with a strong intimation that she would do so, if it weren't taken in the meantime, within a day or two. Things couldn't go on as they were at home much longer, anyhow. Mightn't she as well make an end of that intolerable situation now as later?

But she found on reaching home about six o'clock that this decision had already been taken out of her hands. The look in Anson's face when he met her in the hall told her that something unprecedented had happened.

3

"Father home yet?" she asked, with an affected carelessness which didn't sound just right. Her heart, for some incomprehensible reason, had come up into her throat.

"He was brought home, Miss Beatrice," Anson said reproachfully. "Around eleven o'clock this morning, in an ambulance. He'd been in an accident."

She was bewildered by this news. In the first flash it seemed unfair, sweeping her own concerns off the boards, as it did, so summarily. "Not a bad accident, Anson?" she asked. Oh, but it couldn't be!

"I couldn't say, Miss Beatrice. He won't have it that it is. The doctor was apprehensive at first, but . . ."

"He's in bed, I suppose," she interrupted. "I'll go to him.—I can see him, can't I?" Some involuntary significance of dissent on Anson's part was what made her ask that last question.

He said, "Certainly, Miss Beatrice," but she waited for him to explain his reluctance. "You may not find him quite himself," he warned her, and added that the doctor's orders were strict against any excitement.

Well, of course, Anson knew the sort of terms she's been on with her father lately. She gathered herself up for a retort and then found she hadn't the heart to make it. Before going to her father she paused a moment in her own room to rid herself of her outdoor things and, as well, to steady herself. She tried to think what it would be like to see him helpless. She wondered whether she was sorry or glad. Oh, of course she was sorry. The tears were already near her eyes when she paused in his doorway for her first look at him.

The pillows were packed behind him so that he half reclined, his head was encased in bandages, his left forearm lay across his chest in splints; there was a strong hospital-like smell in the room, of iodoform or something of the sort. All this she was prepared for—and instantly thrust aside as unimportant. What engrossed and frightened her was the way he was looking at her as if her appearance bewildered him, as if he found it unaccountable.

She said, in answer to its seeming question, "Don't you know me, dad? It's Trix!"

"Of course I know you," he answered petulantly, and thickly—as if his tongue were swollen. "I'm not out of my head. What made you think I was? Anson been talking!"

"It was just the way you looked at me," she said shakily, and then went to him. "Oh, dad, I'm so sorry!" she cried.

"Better not touch me," he warned her; "and don't sit on the bed. I'm so sore it hurts to be looked at." Except for the thickness of his speech this sounded natural enough. She pulled up a chair to sit in and forbore to

touch even the big hairy hand that lay slackly on the counterpane.

"I didn't know, of course," she said. "I just came in this minute. I haven't heard yet what happened, or how. Are you well enough to tell me?"

Instead of answering her question he asked one of his own. "Where you been all day, Trix?" For a moment his look pinned her fast; then it wavered away and left her.

"Nowhere much," she answered. "Shopping for a while, and then just—wandering around. There didn't seem to be any special point in coming home."

"Alone?" he asked.

She found herself crying as she answered yes. When she'd wiped her tears and controlled her voice, she elaborated. "Absolutely alone, dad. All day. I haven't spoken to a person I knew since I left you this morning. There wasn't anybody I knew to talk to. Dad, it's *true!* You do trust me as much as that, don't you?"

He shook his head but it wasn't, she thought, so much in dissent as in perplexity; as if she'd thrown him back upon some puzzle of his own. The expression was lost in the twinge of pain the movement cost him. "Poor dad, you must lie still," she admonished him gently. "Tell me what happened to you."

"Hit by a motor-car, it seems. I don't know anything about it. Must have stepped right in front of it, I guess. I sort of remember a lot of yelling and the next thing I knew I was in a bed in St. Luke's Hospital. I'm not damaged to speak of. Broken collar-bone and something in my arm. Half a dozen stitches in my scalp. They thought my skull was fractured at first, but it isn't that kind of a skull. Don't amount to anything—any of that. Tried to saddle a nurse on me! Damned nonsense! Only I've got such a hell of a headache. I'm kind of mixed up. I can't seem to—remember."

"I'm going to be your nurse," she said. Then she asked, in a more or less automatic attempt to explore his lack of memory, "Where were you when all this happened?"

He stared hard at her and that same frightened look came back into his face. "I don't know," he admitted. "Must have been wandering round, myself, I guess. I'd been to see . . . I'd been to some office or other. There were some papers . . . You see, they undressed me at the hospital. I had Anson look through my clothes and he says they aren't there."

She volunteered to go through his pockets for the papers she understood him to say were missing. This was what he meant, wasn't it? And if she didn't turn them up, she could telephone the hospital and find out if they were there. What sort of papers were they?

"You let my pockets alone!" he commanded her truculently. "I didn't say I'd lost any papers. I'll remember all right in a few hours, anyway. My head's clearing up. Just a little more letting alone—that's all I need. You'd better go away now and let me see if I can't get to sleep."

She rose, obediently, moved the chair out of the way, minutely readjusted sundry small articles on the night table, started toward the door at last, and then, with a long-suppressed sob came back to him, kneeled down beside the bed and laid her cheek gently upon his hand.

"*I do* love you, dad!" she cried. "I want you to love me again. I want you to forgive me for being such a beast to you."

He did not speak, but his hand stirred and lightly stroked her face. She kissed the palm, sat back upon her heels like a little twentieth-century Magdalen, squeezed the tears out of her eyes and smiled at him. "I hope you're going to be sick a good long time so you can find out I really mean it," she added.

Anson knocked just then, to announce Doctor Bennett, and she fled to her own room to wash her face. Her last impression of her father was just what her first had been. It had the look in it of one who is struggling with some incredible distortion of memory.

Doctor Bennett was an old friend of Joe's, a convivial,

witty, worldly-wise bachelor whom Beatrice had once or twice met and not taken very seriously since his manner toward her had an obsolete touch of gallantry about it. But his gravity, when he talked with her in the library at the end of his visit to her father, was disquieting. He knew, he said, what a shock it must have been to her to come home, unwarned, and find him like this, but she must contrive to control her feelings and do nothing to excite him. He'd had a terrific blow on the head. The car that had hit him had pitched him, head first, against one of the steel pillars of the elevated railroad, with a noise, the horrified chauffeur had said, like a pile-driver. The scalp had burst wide open from the impact.

Apparently the skull wasn't fractured—though it wasn't always easy to be sure of this. Anyhow, he'd sustained a terrible concussion of the brain. The only treatment for this was to keep him warm and quiet. "He's bothering over some confusion in his memory. It's a wonder he hasn't lost it altogether, temporarily. But don't try to prod it by asking him questions or helping him to put two and two together. Let it alone. He's clearing up fast enough as it is." She readily promised obedience in this matter and asked for further instructions in the details of feeding, temperature-taking and so on.

She was sorry these duties were not more exacting, for the one thing about her feelings she was sure of was that she didn't want to be left sitting round doing nothing. She didn't want to try to appraise the impulse that had taken her back to her father's bedside just before the doctor came nor to decide whether she had meant, by asking him to forgive her, a renunciation of George Burns or not. As a method of not thinking she dressed rather carefully for dinner, which was still a half-hour off when the doctor left.

It was while she was eating this solitary meal and wishing she'd telephoned Jennie MacArthur to come down and share it with her, that she heard the door-bell ring, and a wonder whether it mightn't actually be Jennie made her

listen intently when Anson opened the door. It was, though, a rather coarse-sounding man's voice asking for Mr. Greer. Anson shut the door at this point and she heard no more, but it struck her as odd that it took him as long as it did to get rid of the visitor. He explained upon resuming his duties in the dining-room that the man had found something her father had evidently lost and had been disposed to insist on seeing Mr. Greer with the idea of being rewarded for his trouble. Anson had satisfied him by paying him five dollars out of his own pocket.

"Was it those papers he's been worrying about?" Beatrice asked. Anson couldn't say as to that but they were what appeared to be some papers in a very dirty envelope, addressed to Mr. Greer. He had put them on Mr. Greer's writing desk in the library.

It was in a spirit of sheer idleness that the girl, when she had repaired to this room for an after-dinner cigarette, went over to the desk and looked at the envelope. It was a plain legal-size envelope that had been sealed and roughly torn open. It was crumpled and smeared with mud and the sheaf of typewritten sheets it contained bulged out a little and was threatened with contamination. The impulse that moved her to withdraw it altogether was perhaps half curiosity as to whether this was, after all, the document whose loss had so distressed her father, and the other half mere fastidiousness.

With a gingerly pinch of her finger tips she conveyed the envelope to the wastepaper basket. The stiff sheets in the other hand sprang open and she glanced idly at their typewritten contents. She had no sense of prying. She had assumed all along that the papers related to some matter of business and business was something in which she took the most tepid interest. But her attention was caught by the first line her eye fell upon.

"Party was met at corner of Broadway and . . ." Why, that was the drug-store corner where she used to meet George! . . . "by young lady driving 1918 model Archer roadster, license number . . ."

For a moment the meaning of the words was lost and she stood staring blankly at the page, beset by a sensation of weakness and nausea, undetermined between fright and anger. Then she sat down in the nearest chair and read the document through from the beginning.

It was the report of a detective agency upon her and George, from the twentieth of October, the week of her father's return from the Northwest, to the fifteenth of November, when she'd gone north with him again. It was a pretty thorough job of spying, she noted; not many of their meetings had been missed.

The thing was loathsome;—this was what she felt first, before any thought of the consequences of its revelations had time to form in her mind; loathsome in the chop-licking leering nastiness of its attitude, its implications,—even its very English, though here an attempt had been made to give it a businesslike impersonal cast. She could see the slinking figure of the “operative” loitering outside doorways, looking at its watch, licking its pencil and writing misspelled notes in a greasy note-book. She felt her decency affronted as it would have been by the discovery of a Peeping Tom at her bathroom window.

In her mind she knew it was her father who had put this affront upon her—the phraseology of the report made this explicit,—yet it was a good while before her anger crystallized itself against him. Every one she knew, including herself, seemed bedaubed with the same smeary stuff. People were like that. Her mother and her grandparents had spied upon her. George would probably spy upon her as soon as a sense of a proprietorial right over her licensed his jealousy.

She wanted to get clear of them all, where she could live naked in an empty world. But there was no such world. All worlds were thick with people, loving, hating, spying. She entertained the idea of killing herself. Her father had two or three revolvers and she knew where he kept them. It would serve him right if she did that! Only it would be playing his game, as far as George was concerned. And besides, it wouldn't be fair to George.

She wasn't thinking of George as a lover. That detective's report had put her out of conceit with love,—made it seem dirty to her. It was hard to realize that it was only this afternoon she had been looking at Mrs. Henderson's rooms, pretending to be George's wife. But he was her friend, anyhow. He and Jennie MacArthur were the two squarest people she knew. So she couldn't kill herself. She couldn't even run away without seeing him first.

At half-past eight or thereabouts, she heard her father ring and on impulse she forestalled Anson and answered it herself. She carried the detective's report along with her, rolled up tight in one hand. She had forgotten Doctor Bennett's orders as well as a resolution of her own not to see her father again nor speak to him until he was well nor until her own mind was made up as to what she was going to do.

"Good!" he said crisply, at sight of her in the doorway. "It was you I wanted to see."

"You look better since your nap," she remarked.

"I feel like the devil," he told her; "but my mind's cleared up all right. That's why I want to talk to you, without waiting any longer. Sit down."

She obeyed him without a word. He waited a moment longer before he spoke again. Then, "I've got the goods on you, Trix. I know what you've been up to with this man Burns."

"Yes, and I know what you've been up to, too," she countered. "I've been reading this." She tossed the document contemptuously upon the bed. His good hand groped for it but couldn't quite reach it. "It's the report of your detectives," she added.

"Where in hell did you get hold of that?" he asked.

"A man brought it to the door while I was at dinner," she told him. "He wanted a reward for it and Anson paid him. The envelope was torn open and all muddy. It fell out of your pocket, I suppose, when you were hit by that car. The man had read it, of course—and goodness

knows how many other people. Not that that matters much—to anybody. I spent an hour reading it myself. It's pretty good. Gave you what you wanted, anyhow. And it'll save a lot of sob-stuff—between you and me, I mean."

She was elated by the knowledge that she was hurting him, savagely. He writhed and then, at the pain this movement cost him, groaned out, "Oh, God!"

"You'd better lie still," she went on quietly. "I'm going to tell you what I meant about the sob-stuff. We had quite a lot of it the other time, when George brought me home drunk. All about how you loved me and were going to trust me just the same. Jennie was going to stay here while you were away to take care of me and be my friend. But the past was going to be forgotten. It was a clean slate, you said. I suppose you thought she'd spy on me, anyway. Maybe you told her to. But she didn't. Jennie was square—with me and with you, too. But when you came home she hadn't anything bad to tell you about me. So, before you'd been home a week you hired detectives—to get the goods on me like you said."

He contradicted her here. "I didn't. I didn't put detectives on you. I put 'em on that dog of a chauffeur I'd fired for getting too familiar with you. And God knows I was right to do it."

"Oh, yes, you were right," she admitted. "You thought you'd get me that way, and you did. But if you'd trusted me like you pretended to, or loved me one little bit—the way a girl's father is supposed to—you wouldn't have thought so. That's why I say we can cut out the sob-stuff."

"You stop talking a minute and listen," he commanded. "I happen to want you to get this straight. Burns gave me as a reference when he applied for this job in the air mail. I was fool enough to write them a good strong letter about him. Said he had left me voluntarily to improve his position and I thought he deserved to. I put in everything I could think of to help him. So when I came

home after he'd got the job, I wanted to see how he was getting on. Asked the superintendent about him. I stopped at the field one morning thinking I'd see him take the mail out; wish him luck and so on. It happened I was just too late. He was still in sight, headed south along the lake when I got there. But I stopped and talked with his mechanic. The man had quite a lot to say about him and his luck. One thing he said was that Burns was a hit with the women. There was one swell Jane, he said, used to meet him quite often. Came out sometimes in a big car.

"Trix, I swear I didn't think it was you. Wouldn't believe it was you. But I knew you were sore because I'd let him go. You gave that away the first night we had dinner after I came back. Down at the restaurant—remember? I thought if I could prove to you that he was running with somebody else you'd quit thinking about him. That's why I told the agency to look him up. I never thought they'd get you with him."

"Why not?" she asked. Her reason had accepted his explanation as about half true. He might have gone to see George off in a spirit not wholly unfriendly. He might have entertained a hope that the swell Jane would prove to be some one other than herself. But these concessions did him, in her present mood, no service. His prevarications only made her angrier. So she put all the contempt of clear incredulity into her question. "Why shouldn't it have been me?"

His face darkened. "Why not?" he echoed. "Because I couldn't believe it of you. I couldn't believe that a daughter of mine could ever lower herself to be the private snap of a discharged chauffeur. Why, good God, Trix, when I read that paper this morning in Nathan's office—something queer happened to me. I didn't know where I was. I don't know, now, where I went after I left there, until that car hit me. When I came to I thought perhaps the whole thing had been a kind of nightmare that I'd had since I got hurt;—going to Nathan's of-

fice and reading that damned paper and all. And when you put your face down on my hand a while ago and said you—you wanted me to love you again . . . ”

His voice broke at that and she felt the tears coming up into her eyes. “Trix!” he cried at sight of them. “Tell me it isn’t true—the stuff in that paper. Tell me it’s a lie from beginning to end. Say the bare word and I’ll believe you, even now!”

She took him up. “It isn’t true,” she said quietly.

At the blankly incredulous stare this drew from him, she uttered a short laugh. “What it says is true,” she went on. “George and I went to the places he says we did, and I guess we stayed as long. But what that detective thinks, isn’t true. Nor what you think, either. George is in love with me, but he wants to marry me.—And he’d rather wait till then. I wouldn’t have cared much, myself, except for the way he felt about it. I didn’t know whether I wanted to marry him or not, but I’m going to, now.”

There was a long silence between them after that. She knew it for a lull rather than the end but she waited comfortably, feeling very solid and invincible. She’d never said outright, before,—even to herself,—that she was going to marry George, and the declaration steadied her.

“If that’s true . . . ” her father began at last, but he flinched under her smile and revised the sentence. “As long as that’s true, that you haven’t—gone too far with him, there’s still time to avoid a smash. Say the word and I’ll buy tickets to-morrow for a trip abroad. Mediterranean cruise. Algiers—maybe Cairo; ride around on camels and things. We could start right after Christmas. I could get away by then, I think.”

Her momentary security collapsed. It was a dazzling bribe he offered. Travel, adventure, bright colors in the sunshine, hot sands, camels! But he didn’t stop there; hardly paused.

“I wish we could start to-morrow! It’s this next couple of months . . . That’s only half the bargain, Trix.

You'll have to cut this other business out, absolutely. No tapering off with last farewells and that sort of stuff. You've been on thin ice—God!—and if you have got by so far, it's just a plain miracle. Take my word for that. I know how those things go."

"I suppose you do," she said reflectively, and this stopped him short, with a dull flush and a shifting of the eyes. "I wonder," she persisted, "if you ever saved a girl against herself, the way George has saved me."

"Drop that line, right there!" he commanded. "That isn't decent."

"I wasn't trying to be decent," she said listlessly, "but that's as you like. Only I don't see why you should be so down on me marrying him."

"Then you don't read the papers. Good lord, Trix, you're out of your head! Just about every other day there's some fool daughter of a rich man runs off with her father's chauffeur, and it always ends either in a shooting or in the divorce court. This is my fault, in a way. I was a damned fool to let you run with him the way you did when you first came. But I thought you were a little girl, then; too young to be thinking about things like that. I didn't wake up till it was too late. But I'm awake now, all right. There's no argument on George Burns. He's out!"

"Dad . . ." she began, but paused a moment to search her mind. She'd never been so deeply serious in her life, nor felt so compelling a need to dig out the truth. "Dad, I'm in love with George. I—want him. I'm not silly about him any more. I was at first, like those girls in the papers. But I've learned a lot in these last six months—and I always did know more than you thought I did. Out in Pasadena there were boys that I—let do some of the things they wanted to. Spoony things, I mean. I didn't like it, specially, except that when they were silly about me, that way, they were nice in other ways; did whatever I wanted them to, and took me to places. And there have been one or two, like that, since I came here.

It was kind of exciting—in a way—but that was all. I'm telling you that so you'll see how I know that George is different.

"When I found out what the difference was, I tried to stop. I didn't want to fall in love with him. I was frightened about it. But I couldn't stop. So I don't see what else there is for me to do. If I married somebody else, that I wasn't in love with, I don't know what I might do. And if I don't marry anybody . . . Dad, you must know how it is! I'm like you. I must be, because I'm not like mother, a bit. It never was any trouble for her to be good, I guess."

But this, she saw, was an issue he would not, or could not, meet. "If you're afraid of him," he said uneasily, "I should think that was reason enough not to marry him."

"I said of *it*, not of him," she retorted. "I couldn't be afraid of him.—Dad, he's *good!* He's kind and he's—square. He's never tried to take any advantage, even when I've let him see that he could. And he's *for* me. He's believed in me—through everything. And he's seen enough, goodness knows! And if you'd be—friendly to us, and help him a little . . . He isn't a chauffeur now and he isn't ever going to be, again."

She saw she was getting nowhere with the plea. Her father's face was set. "Good!" she flared out. "He's too good for me, that's the only trouble. He's the best man I know. He's better than either of us."

"The hell he is!" said Joe. "I didn't mean to spring this on you but I guess it's time I did. I'm going to show up this bird. Go to the small middle drawer in my desk and bring me a plain sealed envelope you'll find there.—Bring it in just as it is," he called after her, when, without a word she had gone on the errand. She hated herself for being frightened, but there was no disguising the fact that she was. "Now, open it," he commanded when again she stood before him. "Look and see what's inside."

It was a cancelled check for a thousand dollars, made out to George Burns, and bearing her father's signature.

"Turn it over and look at the endorsement," he added.
"You know his handwriting, I guess."

She obeyed him mechanically. "What was this for?" she asked. She managed to make her voice ring cold and hard enough, but she sat down quickly in the chair she had recently quitted.

"Doesn't the date tell you anything?" he asked. It was back in August. "Why, that's the day I fired him. The day he brought you home drunk. As you say, he'd seen enough."

She repeated, word for word, her former question, this time with a peremptory emphasis. "What was this check for?"

It stung him to an outburst of anger. "Why, if you want it straight, it was the price he got for keeping his mouth shut and for letting you alone."

"Blackmail?" she asked.

"Call it that if you like. That was the understanding between us. He's welshed on half of it, it seems. Whether he has on the other or not, I don't know. Anyhow, there's your paragon. And there's how much in love with you he is. Less than a thousand dollars' worth!"

She felt herself strangled, drowning, and she beat her way frantically back to breathable air. "I know you're a liar," she gasped, "and I believe you're lying about this." Then, more to the purpose, as her intelligence came to the rescue, "If that's what he is, why did you recommend him for the air service? And why did you go down to see him off and wish him luck the day his mechanic told you about me?"

The fierceness of her attack had won her a moment's breathing space. She folded the check and tucked it into the bosom of her dress.

"What are you doing with that?" he demanded.

"I'm going to show it to him, to-morrow; see what his side of the story is. Maybe he's what you say he is. I don't know—about anybody, any more. But I want his own word for this."

With that she rose to leave him. He struggled to sit erect but dropped back with an uncontrollable groan of anguish. A smile, which felt all awry, came unexpectedly into her face. "It's a dirty trick to fight with you when you're helpless like this," she observed. "But I suppose if you'd been up and around you'd have choked me, long ago."

"Never mind about that," he told her. "But listen to this so there won't be any mistake about it. Back last April, some time, I asked you to come and be my daughter. I'd got along without you all right till then. I can get along without you now. And if you see that dog again, even if it's only to match his word against mine, I'm through. Perhaps you'd better not tell him so till after he's married you. It might make some difference to him. I mean it, Trix. That's a promise I won't break, anyhow."

"Oh, we're at the end, all right, whatever I do about George. We'd have come to smash about something, I suppose, if it hadn't been for him. We're too much alike, that's the trouble with us. Just a little more difference and we might have made it. I—I wish we had!"

Suddenly she turned away from him, feeling she couldn't bear the look in his face. "I guess I may as well go now," she added roughly. "No use dragging out the agony any longer, is there?"

She left the room swiftly without waiting for a reply, but a few minutes later, clad in a big fur coat he had given her before they went North and with her purse in the pocket of it, she reappeared in his doorway. She could perfectly well have taken time to change and pack, but it was better drama like this and she needed all the support she could get. The little bag in the down-town hotel made it easy.

"You don't mean you're going now!" her father cried. "Not at this time of night! Where could you go?"

She saw he didn't believe she meant it. "It isn't late,"

she said. "Not much after nine. And there are plenty of hotels. I've still got that good old original five hundred, you see.—Most of it. I do mean it, dad. I'm really going. It wouldn't do any good to wait till morning. It would only mean that we'd have another big fight—and they aren't good for you when you're like this."

She went over to the side of the room where he was, moving warily as she approached the bed, and, bending down, rang his bell. "Some farewell orders to Anson," was all the explanation she vouchsafed.

When the man answered the summons, she said, "I'm going away, Anson. I'd like you to telephone Miss MacArthur. Tell her how things are and say I want her to come here and take charge till father's around again. And I think you'd better telephone the doctor, too. He said dad was to be quiet, and we haven't been, very, so perhaps he'll be worse.—That's all, I guess. You can tend to everything else, yourself."

Anson hesitated, expecting, perhaps, some contradictory word from his employer, but none came and he turned to go. "Wait a minute," Trix called, and held out her hand to him. "Good-by," she said as he came back and took it. "You've been awfully nice to me, Anson."

"Good-by, Miss Beatrice. I'm sorry you're leaving us. Not for long, I hope."

"Oh, till hell freezes over, or thereabouts," she told him with a sort of laugh. "I'm sorry, too."

He bowed gravely, without the slightest change of manner, and went away, to telephone. "That's the kind of person to be," she commented as she turned, wet-eyed, to her father.

She wanted a breath and a gulp or two before she could be sure of any voice to go on with. "I'd kiss you good-by," she said, with another laugh—mostly sob, this time,— "if I wasn't afraid you'd wring my neck if you got hold of me. Because I do love you, dad. I guess I always will; whatever happens, I'm glad I came last April—and I'm sorry I've got to go away now."

"You don't have to," he asserted. "This is all your own doing."

She was in the doorway when he said that, and she turned at it. "Will you let George come here with me when he comes back from Cleveland, to-morrow, and see what he's got to say about that check?"

But she saw from his look, before she'd done speaking, that he took this as a symptom of weakening;—the threatened departure as a bluff. So without giving him time to refuse she went straight on. "Oh, of course, that wouldn't do any good. Very likely I'd go with him anyhow. Good-by."

His voice broke in a sob as he called after her, "God damn you, Trix!"

4

She took a taxi to the hotel where she'd checked her hand-bag, with the idea of stopping there for the night, but in the lobby a wave of homesickness broke over her and on an obscure impulse she telephoned to Mrs. Henderson. If the rooms she'd looked at this afternoon were still vacant she'd come down and occupy them to-night. She couldn't promise to rent them permanently until she'd shown them to her husband but she'd pay for the night's lodging, anyhow. Mrs. Henderson was agreeable and within another half-hour Beatrice was installed in what might become her home.

Her assessment of this likelihood wavered a good deal during the night. The landlady, at their second meeting, was not the gushing fountain of sympathy Trix had found her in the afternoon. The furs and the evening frock seemed to have a chilling effect;—awakened suspicion, perhaps. But the little apartment, when the girl was left alone in it, made a background for exciting fancies. It was spacious enough for two, and quite decently clean. Its dinginess would disappear under a little brightening up. In imagination she furnished it with two or three good rugs, an easy chair apiece for her and George, and a reading lamp for the table. The funereal onyx mantel

she put back into the shadows behind the glow of an anthracite fire. Could she do it all to-morrow morning, she wondered, and have it ready to show George when he came? No, of course she couldn't. To-morrow was Thanksgiving (poor old dad!) and the stores would be closed. In her nightdress she pottered about fancifully for an hour, until the cold finally drove her to bed.

She fell asleep at once, having had, since she'd awakened in the Minneapolis train that morning, a pretty full day. But later, in the dead of night, she found herself broad awake and unable for a few minutes to remember where she was. A high wind had sprung up and was banging the loose window sashes furiously. The bed was cold, and worn down into unaccommodating hollows.

The thought of sharing that bed with George Burns presented itself to her as fantastic—impossible. She must have been clean out of her head to have entertained it; to have come to wait for him in a place like this.

It was funny about that thousand dollar check—that he should have pocketed it and cashed it, and then have come to meet her on the Municipal Pier that day and said nothing about it; neither then nor since. Of course he had taken it. There was no getting away from that signature. It *would* seem like an awful lot of money if you were working for thirty dollars a week. Only—well, it showed how little you could tell about people. Probably she was lucky to have found out about him in time.

To-morrow . . . She could never go back to her father. He'd have her at his mercy if she did that. Subjugated—that was the word. She couldn't go back to her mother, either—not with the lemon-grower hanging about. He'd never give her a look in. A job, then; that was what it came to. Hollywood, that she'd flaunted in her father's face with such bravado! It broke over her that her notion of becoming a picture actress had been nothing but childish folly, a dream she'd shared with ten million other girls and had little better chance than they of realizing. If she had all the clothes her father had bought her during

the last six months she could get work enough as an extra to keep her alive—in lodgings meaner than these that depressed her now. And she might work into stunts, doubling for well-known stars, but even this was a long road.

What was the use? She'd been a fool to leave home without one of her father's revolvers. Of course, there was always the lake. The lake, on a night like this! The storm terrified her. She thought of George trying to fly through it. Perhaps he wouldn't come to-morrow.

What sleep she managed to get during the rest of the night was troubled by dreams and half-wakings, and by morning she was pretty well washed out. She made a wretched breakfast at a cheap neighborhood restaurant and at nine o'clock telephoned Anson to inquire about her father, especially to learn how much the worse he was for their quarrel the night before.

He was very official. He was answering, she surmised, at an instrument which was within her father's hearing, and he recited his instructions in a tone that conveyed no human feeling whatever. He couldn't say as to Mr. Greer's condition and he was to receive no messages.

"Oh, well, give him my love when you get a chance," she said forlornly. "Keep it for yourself until you do. I'll write him a letter, to-morrow, maybe." She was completely resourceless when she turned away from the telephone. She had literally nothing to do.

The weather, though, gave her something to think about. Last night's gale was still blowing in from the lake. It wasn't possible—was it—that George would try to fly to-day? About ten o'clock she telephoned the office of the superintendent of the air mail to put an end to her uneasiness by confirming this opinion, and to her horrified amazement was told in matter-of-fact tones that the mail had left Cleveland at eight-thirty as usual and might be expected in about noon.

She set out at once afoot for Grant Park despite a prospective wait there of nearly two hours. Common

sense, she was aware, in the person of Jennie MacArthur or Mrs. Henderson, would have counseled diversion, pointing out that she couldn't do the flyer any good by watching the clouds and worrying about him. Diversion! That showed what common sense amounted to.

As it happened (and often it does!) irrational instinct proved the better guide. The fierceness of the gale—more evident here on the lake front than back among the big buildings of the loop—whipped up a corresponding fierceness in her mood, an emotion much more stimulating than the cold misery of the earlier morning. She raged at the order and the complacent authority of a world where soft-bellied men in armchairs could send their betters aloft to play tag with death, not upon glorious enterprises but about the prosaic business of delivering letters. It would serve them right if George should arrive with bombs instead of his sacks of mail and sprinkle them around upon the roofs of that lazy town where, by the way of celebrating a holiday, people overslept in anticipation of overeating, later on. She built up an angry grievance against the absentees from the park—they turned out numerously enough, goodness knew, on a fine day!—and equally against the indifferent few who were here, variously occupied but alike in their dull unconcern with the storm.

A special object of her annoyance was the driver of a small mail truck who drove out over the Randolph Street viaduct and backed up against the wind not far from where she stood. She watched him resentfully for five minutes, while he was getting his pipe alight and making himself comfortable, before she recognized, in his presence here, an official expectation that George would accomplish his journey safely.

She went over to him and asked if he was waiting for the air mail. When he nodded she went on, "Do you think he'll ever make it, a day like this?"

"Going to make a record trip, I guess—with this wind behind him. It's the fellow going the other way you want to be sorry for."

This struck Trix as outrageously unfair. "You'd be sorry for yourself, I bet, if you had to land in a place like this."

He didn't deny it, but he thought this man would probably get down all right. "You can never tell, though," he went on. "They killed one of these fellows only day before yesterday. Plane caught fire and burnt him to a crisp."

She had turned away with justifiable homicide in her heart and was walking off, when he called after her, "There he comes, now!"

She saw the plane, far out over the lake. It didn't seem possible—or durable—that he could fly so slowly. She would shut her eyes and count long seconds before she looked again, only to see him, a little bigger, perhaps, in the same place.

A crew of mechanics had come out of the hangar and were watching him, too—callously, she thought. They didn't care whether he got down safely or not. It seemed to her now that he was going straight by, as if he didn't know where he was. They ought to signal him somehow. Oh, the fools, the *fools*, to stand there doing nothing!

No, he was turning now, careening horribly as he came round. She felt herself going sick and shut her eyes but opened them again as the roar of his motor ceased. He whipped across the park like a bit of driven scud, banked again and was on the ground, taxiing toward them, the plane bouncing and bucking along like a mean horse. She could hear the rigid fabric clanking like a loose tin roof. The crew were running toward him.

She wanted to run, too, but she couldn't. She hadn't strength enough to stir. He'd get out of his plane and go away and never know she'd come to meet him.

The truck-driver had been cranking his motor; now as it started he looked round at her. "Want to ride over there?" he asked, and added as she assented with a speechless nod, "I didn't know he was your fellow or I wouldn't have been so careless what I said."

George didn't see her as she came up and she was glad of a minute to feast her eyes upon him. He was deep in talk with the master mechanic,—“tail heavy” was a phrase her ear picked up,—criticizing details of the plane's performance. He had his helmet dangling in his hand and the wind was ruffling his short curly hair and drying the sweat on his forehead. “Well,” the master said, “two hours and twenty-four minutes is nothing to kick about. Fastest yet, I guess.”

At that George turned and saw her standing beside him and in an instant she was in his arms, her mouth upon his, and the world a dancing blur. Hitherto, in public, they'd always been careful to give their meetings a casual air, but this embrace was as much at his initiative as at hers.

“I didn't think you'd come, to-day,” he said unsteadily, “with your father home, and all; and me ahead of time, too. But I wanted you so, I was afraid to look around for you.”

“I've been waiting out here for you,” she declared, “ever since I heard you'd started.

“I've had an awful row with dad,” she told him, when he'd drawn her aside to make way for the activities of the crew. “He says I'm not his daughter, any more. He told me to tell you that because it might make a difference. Does it?”

“I should say it did!” he cried, pulling her up in his arms again. “Does it mean you're going to marry me, now, Trix?”

She told him, blissfully, that it did. “To-day! This minute, if we could.—I've already got a place for us to live,” she added, and she felt him give a sob at that. “I slept there alone, last night.”

The mail-truck driver—in defiance of strictest regulations—gave them a ride across the long viaduct, she sitting in George's lap, and a cruising yellow cab conveyed them to the City Hall. It wasn't till they had rattled the locked door of the license clerk's office and stared blankly

at each other in the deserted corridor, that they realized that the Thanksgiving holiday frustrated their plan.

"I suppose to-morrow will have to do," she said dismally. "Oh, well, cheer up! One day isn't so much."

"It can't be to-morrow, either," he dejectedly informed her. "I've got to take the mail out again at eight-thirty in the morning, and this office won't be open by then."

"How about your two days off, between trips?" she demanded blankly.

He explained that he was doing double duty, this week. There'd been an accident . . .

"The man that was killed? Burnt up?"

There'd been an accident, he repeated, ignoring the interruption, and as they were short-handed he had volunteered to fill in. He was paid extra mileage, of course, but it wasn't that. It was so as not to interrupt the service.

She blew up before he could say any more and, in a mixture of tears and temper, accused him of not caring when they were married, of not wanting to marry her at all, and in a final fury she delivered an ultimatum: unless he married her to-morrow, somehow, she wouldn't marry him; she'd go back to California on the night train. They'd let him off to-morrow's run if he'd just show spunk enough to ask them to.

He was pretty glum about agreeing to this, but at last he did, and even consented to her going with him to make the request. They walked in unbroken silence to the post-office, only to find they'd missed the superintendent by minutes. He'd gone home to his Thanksgiving dinner. Trix got his home address, though, from the clerk and they picked up another taxi and started to hunt him down. She was on the point of weeping again over her lover's reluctance when suddenly she laughed instead and snuggled against him.

"I've got an idea," she declared. "We won't ask him to let you off. We'll ask him to let me go with you. We'll fly over together and be married in Cleveland, to-morrow."

She couldn't at first get him to take the idea seriously. They never carried passengers in the mail planes. It wasn't allowed. She argued that this was no reason why it shouldn't be done, for once, in a case like this. Let him leave the man to her. She'd fix him!

"Suppose anything was to happen, Trix," he ventured, but she had a swift answer to this argument.

"If you're going to be killed, to-morrow, I'd rather be killed with you than have you killed by yourself. Wouldn't you?"

She had her way, even as she predicted she would. They found the official in his least official mood, and what with the starry look in her eyes and the thrill in her voice and the romance inherent in the situation, he was able to offer no more than a perfunctory resistance. By four o'clock the red tape was unwound, the necessary authorization signed and sealed and the pair, in their fourth taxi, laughed in happy vacuity at the chauffeur's question, where to?

"I sort of believe I must be hungry," George remarked. "I haven't eaten since breakfast. Didn't want the sandwich they gave me at Bryan."

"I haven't eaten anything since last night," she said. "George! Thanksgiving dinner!"

She directed the chauffeur to one of her father's favorite restaurants and here they spent two unregarded hours, silent and talkative by turns, sometimes frankly holding hands across the board, sometimes, for fun, distantly ceremonious.

When he got out his pocketbook to pay the bill, she laughed in a way that made him ask her why.

"I thought of something I'd forgotten," she said. "Something I promised dad I'd ask you about. It's that thousand dollar check he gave you the night you brought me home, last summer."

He flushed bright red and before answering unbuttoned his waistcoat and from a deep pocket pulled out a sealed envelope which he handed over to her. It was ad-

dressed, she saw, to her father, but a thrill she got out of the moist, body-warm feel of the packet distracted her attention.

"There's his dirty money, waiting for him," George said. "I've been wanting to tell you about that. He gave me the check that night when I took him to the train. He said it was a reward for looking after you. And then, at the last minute, like, he said he didn't want me for chauffeur, any more, and I was to understand I was to let you alone and keep my mouth shut."

"I'd have given it back to him, then, only, you see, I didn't know what you'd been telling him. Thought you might have made me the goat. I was rattled and I couldn't think, for the minute, how else he could have found out about everything. And the next day, when I hadn't heard from you, I cashed the check—in those same bills. I've never touched a cent of it. After that, I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't know how things were coming out with you. And I couldn't send it back to him without as good as telling him that I was going with you. So I just waited."

"I knew it must be something like that," she remarked. "It didn't bother *me* a bit."

"Well," he said, "it can go back to him to-night, all right. I'm glad to be rid of it."

Her ear caught something a little unreal in the readiness of this declaration; not unwillingness nor even quite regret. After all, a thousand dollars was a lot of money. Would be, to them.

"I don't see why it should go back," she asserted. "No, George, listen. You kept your bargain with him that day on the Municipal Pier, when I wanted to run away with you and you wouldn't. You said you hadn't any money and you wouldn't do it on mine. Now, when I've had a row with him and he's turned me out—in the snow—I don't see what kick he has on my coming to you."

He laughed at this argument and said it sounded pretty thin to him. "However," he added, "we can talk about that, later."

She tucked the envelope into her coat pocket. "Talk, nothing!" she said. "You've already paid the money back. To me. I'll write and tell him so, anyhow. And I'll decide whether to send it along to him, or not."

They both fell silent after this and presently she asked him what he was thinking about. "About to-morrow's flight," he reluctantly confessed. "Wondering how rough the air would be and how high a ceiling we'd have. Sometimes when one of these east gales has blown out it pulls around and gives you as pretty a day as you ever saw. But if it's bad, Trix, the thing's off, for you—see?" She didn't openly dissent and after a minute he added with an uneasy laugh, "I never was scared of a trip before. But when I think what it would mean if anything went wrong"

"You're tired," she interrupted; "that's all the matter with you. No wonder, doing double work like this. Let's forget it, for to-night, anyway.—I'll tell you what let's do. Let's go and have a look at the place I've picked out for us to live. See what you think of it. It looked pretty good to me last night, when I was thinking how we'd fix it up."

"I can't believe that part of it, Trix. That's God's own truth," he told her, and his voice broke over the words.

"I've brought Mr. Burns," she told Mrs. Henderson half an hour later, "to see whether he likes our house. If he does, we're going to take it. You needn't bother to come up, I guess. I can show him around all right." But Mrs. Henderson, full of sympathetic good-will once more, wouldn't consider it a bother, and there might be some questions Mr. Burns would like to ask; so she heavily led the way up-stairs and showed them into the apartment, with ceremony.

George hadn't any questions to ask, it seemed, and his replies to those of Beatrice, whether he liked this, or thought that would do, were almost monosyllabic, but when the tour of inspection was finished, she answered, confi-

dently, for his being satisfied with it. "We'll take it for a month, then, anyway. And I guess we might as well pay now. Shall I, George, or have you got it handy?"

"I've got it, right here," he said.

"Well, I'll be glad to have you here," Mrs. Henderson assured him, "though I expect it'll be a strain on my nerves. Your wife was telling me yesterday about your job you had. My heart ached for her, alone last night, what with the storm and all. I'm glad she'll have you with her to-night."

Trix saw her lover's face go dull red and noted that his hands, busy with his pocketbook, were shaking so that he could hardly extricate the bills he wanted. But he made no disclaimer and he paid over the first month's rent. Mrs. Henderson, apparently, had seen nothing. She said, as she went away with the money, that she'd bring back the receipt as soon as ever she could make it out.

"Don't bother," Trix called after her. "Leave it on the hall table and we'll get it—some time or other." Then she closed the door, and, leaning back against it, faced her lover.

There was one aspect of her aerial elopment which Beatrice had not counted upon. She had been vaguely aware that their departure in the mail plane on Friday morning had stimulated a marked interest in the group of spectators. She'd also been conscious, through the haze of enveloping sensations, when they landed in Cleveland, of the click of cameras and the rattle of questions. And there'd been an awfully nice girl, a reporter on one of the local papers, who'd made her a call at the hotel after their marriage in the afternoon and might have stayed longer if George's return hadn't shooed her away. But none of this had prepared her for the next morning's paper. **MILLION-AIRE'S DAUGHTER ELOPES WITH MAIL PILOT** was the seven-column heading across the front page. She had become a celebrity! She wondered what her father would think of that.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ROMANCE

1

JOE suffered no apparent relapse as a result of his quarrel with his daughter. He saw the papers, of course, with the sensational accounts of her elopement, including interviews with Beatrice herself, but they were able to spare him the reporters who came to get his side of the story. Jennie, who had come back to the apartment in response to Anson's message and stayed a fortnight, dealt with them competently, of course. Two or three days was all that phase of the affair lasted. He surprised her by taking it so quietly, for the papers were making him look like the theatrical purse-proud father who hadn't thought an ex-aviator who had fought in France good enough to marry his daughter. They made it appear, also, that George, already in love with Beatrice, had taken the job of chauffeur, in order to be near her. Whether this was the story the pair were telling, or merely the conventional line of least resistance always followed by re-write men in newspaper offices, it came to the same thing.

Joe's only defense was to make Jennie read the report of the detective agency, and during the sleepless hours of the night after she had finished it, she was angry and humiliated. She felt the sting of contempt in the girl's duplicity. She could remember dates mentioned in the report as specific days; how on this day and that, after stolen hours with her lover, Trix had come back to her, demure, innocent—laughing at her! She'd been fooled to

the top of her bent, and she acknowledged as much to Joe when she came into his room next morning to see what sort of night he'd had.

"Pretty rotten with this headache," he told her, "but better than you, at that, judging from your looks. You look like a washout."

"That's about how I feel," she admitted. "I don't see how you can forgive me, Joe. I was wrong about her, all the way through—and never surer in my life that I was right. I wouldn't have believed it, except for what's happened."

"It's all right," he told her. "No good crying over spilt milk." He added, "Here's a letter from her; came in this morning. Dispose of it, will you?"

The envelope, addressed in the girl's sprawling hand, was still sealed. "Dispose of it how?" Jennie asked.

"Burn it up, I guess. Read it first if you like, of course, but don't tell me what's in it. I don't want to know.—I've had enough, Jennie."

She guessed that he'd like to have her read it and tell him she'd done so, but she carried it to the office with her, undecided whether she would or not. She felt, with the report of the detective agency fresh in her mind, that, like Joe, she'd had enough, and, finally, she tore the letter to bits, unopened, and dropped them into her waste-paper basket, telling herself as she did so that this was the end of her concern with Beatrice Greer.

Of course it was not. The girl had been too vital a factor in her life during the past half-year to be dismissed like that. It would have been easier, she thought during the first of the ensuing days, to stop wondering about her if she'd read that letter. It was curiosity that was nagging her, demanding satisfaction.

A week or thereabout after she'd destroyed the letter, Beatrice walked into her office with no more warning than the tap of a knuckle upon her half-open door. Jennie, who had swung round in her chair to see who the visitor was, felt herself go limp at the sight of her. Her face was

glowing with the sting of the wind-driven snow, tiny melted drops of it hung in her eyelashes, and it lay in drifts in the folds of her fur coat. She blinked the blur out of her eyes, looked at Jennie fixedly for a moment, then stooped and, briskly, kissed her. "I thought I'd do that before you could stop me," she said. She turned away as she threw back her coat, then pulled up a chair and sat down.

"I didn't specially want to stop you," Jennie said; "—only I know now that it doesn't mean anything. And never did."

"That means dad has been making you read the detective's report, I suppose," Beatrice commented. "I did think, perhaps . . . But never mind that, now. What I came for was to make you tell me about my father. I've telephoned two or three times, but Anson won't say a word. Last night I went to your flat to see you, but you weren't there, so I suppose you're still at our house. It was one of George's nights at Cleveland and I was feeling kind of lonesome. He'll be back to-day, about noon—" She glanced out the window where a momentary flaw of snow had obliterated the shore-line of the lake. "—Unless he gets lost in that. So I thought, while I was waiting, I'd come here and find out; from you or Henry Craven. I want to know if I made him a lot worse, that night I went away, by quarreling with him."

"No, I don't think so," Jennie said. "Doctor Bennett seems to think he's getting on as well as could be expected. Both the bones are knitting up very nicely. Of course he's terribly bothered by having only one hand. But it's his head that makes the most of the trouble."

"His head!" The girl frowned, but there was a gleam of something besides concern in her eye. "Do you mean there's anything—the *matter* with it?"

"There's nothing the matter with his mind, if that's what you're thinking of," Jennie answered rather grimly. "Why? Did you hope there was?"

"Not exactly. Only I wrote him a letter a while ago, that I thought perhaps he'd answer; and he never did."

"He got it all right," Jennie informed her, "but he wouldn't read it. Gave it to me to tear up for him. I did—without opening it."

Beatrice laughed shortly. "There was a perfectly good check for a thousand dollars in that letter." In response to Jennie's stare of undisguised astonishment, she went on to explain. "It was the thousand dad gave George as a reward. He cashed the check for it, but never touched the money. When he ran away with me, he made me send it back. I put it in my account at the bank and sent dad a check for it, telling him, in the letter, what it was. I didn't much want to, but George stood over me until I did. But I guess if you tore it up, that settles that. Only you might tell dad what was in the letter."

"I don't think I will," Jennie said thoughtfully. "Not for the present, anyhow. When his head gets better, I suppose I will."

"What *is* the matter with his head?" Beatrice asked.

"It aches," Jennie told her simply. "All the time. Night and day. Never stops. It isn't a sharp ache, he says; it's just as if his brain was a size too big for his skull. But if he gets excited or makes any exertion, it's worse;—beats, like hammers. That's why I'm not going to tell him."

"Pretty awful for him, that would be," the girl reflected soberly. "How long will it keep up, do you suppose?"

"Months, perhaps, Doctor Bennett says. He hasn't told Joe that, though."

"Months!" Trix echoed, aghast. "That'll drive him crazy."

"I don't know what it'll drive him to," said Jennie.

"And I suppose," Beatrice said roughly, "you think it's all my fault."

Jennie didn't answer at once. "I wish I did," she said at last. "It's my fault, a good deal of it. That's what's worrying me."

"Because you didn't play detective, yourself, and find out about George before dad came home?—What difference

would that have made? You came nearer succeeding, the way you tried. You almost made it. If you'd—cared about me a little more—enough so you *had* to ask questions . . . Oh, it would have come to the same thing in the end, I guess, whatever anybody did. Only, Jennie . . . ”

Beatrice got up, restlessly, and went to the window. “It’s clearing up a little, I believe,” she said; but then she came back, seated herself on the corner of Jennie’s desk, and tried again. “You told me once—it was the first real talk we ever had together—that you weren’t an old maid, exactly. I’ve thought of that, since, and wondered what you meant by it. I don’t suppose you’d care to tell me that, now, feeling about me the way you do.”

She paused there, tentatively, but Jennie volunteered nothing, and after a moment’s silence, without looking at her, Trix went on. “I thought perhaps you meant that you’d had a lover once, yourself. Really, I mean. And that you knew what it meant to—want him. And if you did mean that, maybe you’d understand . . . You said when I kissed you, just now, that you knew it didn’t mean anything and never had. Well, I thought if you did a little remembering, maybe you’d know better than that.”

“I guess perhaps I do,” Jennie admitted. She took the girl’s two arms for a moment in a tight grip. “I’m glad you said that,” she added. “I’m on Joe’s side, more than ever. He’s going to need all the help he can get. Whatever I do’ll be done for him. All the same I wish you luck, and I hope you’re going to be happy. You are, I suppose, now.”

“Yes, I am.” The words were uninflected, and her laugh acknowledged how dubious they had sounded. “I mean,” she explained, “I don’t know whether happy’s the exact word or not. I’m glad I did it. I’d be glad, even if it was all going to end in a crash, half an hour from now out there on the lake front, when George gets in from Cleveland. Because it’s been something, already, that I’d never have been quite—alive without. But—life’s kind of

funny, isn't it? Funnier than any one ever tells you. You have to go ahead and find it out for yourself."

She wasn't asking for sympathy, though, as she made clear by rising from the corner of the desk and moving away a little. "I'm going to school, again," she added, on a brighter note. "George isn't crazy about having me do it, but I tell him I'd *go* crazy if I didn't. What I'd really like is to learn to drive a plane and then get a job, myself, in the mail. I'd get the Omaha run, you see, and then we could come sailing in from opposite directions at the same time, and have our two days off, together, here. It gives George fits to have me talk like that, but it's silly of him because I could learn to do it just as well as he could. Anyhow, there isn't a chance of it, so he needn't worry."

She scribbled a line or two on Jennie's scratch pad. "There's where we live, now," she concluded. "I don't know how long we'll stay. George is talking about moving to Cleveland, but I don't want to, much. Anyhow, they'll forward it, if anything happens you want to tell me about."

"I don't suppose anything much will happen," Jennie said, rising and walking to the door with her. "It's probably just the sort of mood I've been in that makes me feel as if something would. I'm glad to have your address, anyway. And if anything happens to you, let me know. I'm glad you came to-day—and told me what you did.—Good-by, Trix."

She'd had to resist an impulse to say a good deal more than that. All her resentment against the girl had been sponged out and the underlying affection made legible again. She'd have liked to say, "Come to me, nights when George is in Cleveland." But Joe would never have been able to understand a divided loyalty, nor would she dare risk an attempt to keep him in the dark about it. No, Trix would have to lie in the bed she had made. Jennie went to the window to stare at the lead-colored sky and watch the thinning flurries of snow. She didn't even

try to get her mind back upon her own affairs until she had seen the Cleveland mail plane make a safe landing in Grant Park.

Before Christmas she found a use for the address Beatrice had given her. Joe was up and about by that time, and she had moved back once more to her own flat. He asked her, on one of the first days after his return to the office, to go to his apartment at her convenience, sometime when he wasn't there, and clear out the blue room, pack everything up that she'd find there—and dispose of it. Anson and his wife would help her. The blue room had belonged to Beatrice.

"Do you care what I do with the stuff?" she asked.

"Not a damn," he told her with a steady stare, "as long as you don't tell me anything about it. I want to find the room empty."

So Jennie packed all the clothes and trinkets she found in the blue room and despatched them to Beatrice. It was, she had no doubt, what Joe wanted her to do with them.

2

Joe had expressed his wish to Jennie with characteristic accuracy; he wanted to find Beatrice's room empty. Sweeping away all reminders of her was merely the symbol of the harder thing he was trying to do—empty his memory of her. He kept casting back in his thoughts to the time, less than a year ago, before the news had come of his wife's contemplated divorce. He'd been comfortable and contented enough then. Let him go on from there, as if the services of the respectable lawyer in Pasadena had never been retained and the letter to Trix, despatched over Jennie's protest, had never been written.

It was funny that had never occurred to him before—but he saw, now, how true it was—that the only really bitter experiences of his life were those which involved him with members of his family; in youth with his father, in early manhood with his wife, in middle age with his daughter.

With the rest of the world he got on satisfactorily enough. Not always amicably, to be sure, but where was the harm in a good fight with a stranger—or even with the sort of pleasant acquaintance you called a friend? It keyed you up to a better best than you could command in ordinary circumstances, and there wasn't a drop of poison in it. You gave, or took, your licking and went on from there. When it was done, it was done with. But with your own blood, or with the wife of your bed, it was different, whichever way the battle went.

He'd been no match for his father, not even after he'd grown too big to lick, and for many years after the final defeat of which his flight had been the admission, there had rankled in him an insatiable grudge. He'd never got over it, really, until his affair with Annabel gave him something else to think about.

And then, look at Annabel! She'd been no match for him. He'd bullied her rather than quarreled with her—there wasn't enough *to* her to quarrel with seriously. Anyhow, it had been as the unchallenged victor in their differences that he'd gone off to Lima. He'd put her clearly in the wrong by asking her to go with him. But had this fact done him any good? Not a bit of it. The thought of her had rankled, too; longer and more bitterly than the boyhood memories of his father. It was funny about that, too. He'd had relations with other women that had lasted longer, and meant more at the time, than those unhappy months with Annabel, and none of them had ever bothered him much. Annabel had gone on bothering him until Beatrice had put her out of his head.

Well, he wasn't going to let Beatrice nag him through the next twenty years, not though she had declared, in what were almost the last words she'd spoken to him, that she would never stop loving him.

Loving! A lot she'd loved him—leaving him like that, helpless, seriously ill, for a damned chauffeur! And after he'd shown her that cancelled check, too, with George Burns's endorsement on it,—documentary proof of

the man's duplicity. Her retort to that had been to call her own father a liar. She'd been lying to him for weeks, months—from the very beginning, most likely.

She hadn't got away with it, though. She'd deceived Jennie, but she hadn't deceived him. Very likely she'd lied to him that night in proclaiming the innocence of her love-affair with George. It was quite possible—the sweat beaded out on Joe's forehead when he thought of this—that she was already pregnant that night; that she had no alternative to marrying George, crook though he'd been proved to be.

She'd shown herself his own daughter in that, anyhow. She'd bluffed it through and left him with the colors of her pride still flying at the mast-head. There had, indeed, been no victor and no vanquished in that engagement. This time the fighters had been fairly matched. He thought Trix herself would acknowledge that.

Often he wondered what she had said in the letter he'd turned over to Jennie to destroy. Jennie had read it first, most likely; he'd as good as told her to. He'd never ask her what had been in the letter, but he would rather like to know whether she'd read it or not. Just as well not to ask, though. Just as well and a whole lot better. There was no telling where you'd stop if you began asking questions. He'd been thinking about the girl now, for an hour. Quit! That was the only thing to do. Forget her. Sweep her out. Make the place empty.

One thing would make it easier. The girl could take care of herself. She'd pretty well proved that. Always light on her feet somehow, she would. In that, again, she was her father's daughter. That had been the principal trouble about Annabel. She had been so damned helpless. And then, of course, Annabel had a baby. Trix would have a baby, too, most likely. If his latest guess about her was right, she had one already on the way. A grandson of his! No, by God! Not as long as that damned chauffeur was his father.

Suppose the fellow left her—as a man was apt to do

when he'd married after the first climax of passion was past—what then? Trix would never come creeping home with her baby in a bundle, after the manner of the heroines of old melodrama, to say she'd been foolish and had done wrong. Not in a thousand years! Not Trix. She'd starve first, she and the baby together. Or jump in the lake. Or turn on the gas.—Why in the hell did he sit there like a maudlin fool, thinking of things like that! She knew he would, damn her. That's why she'd said, just before she went away, that she'd never stop loving him. Just to give the screw a last tormenting turn. Now he'd waked up his head again. Started the hammers going inside his skull.

That was the whole trouble with him, really. And Bennett, the complacent ass, insisted that there was nothing to be done about it except wear it out. Three to six months, or it might be even longer, that headache would last, he said. Idiocy, that was. There must be something that would relieve the pressure. Lift the cloud. But Bennett wouldn't tell him, he supposed, from a fear that the medicine, whatever it was, would be bad for him, affect his heart, perhaps, or form a habit. What if it did? There was no habit that couldn't be broken, granted a man had a strong enough jaw to lock his teeth.

At his normal pitch of resolution, he would have called in another doctor forthwith, and in default of anything satisfactory out of him would have begun experimenting on his own account among the analgic and narcotic drugs for his remedy; but the trouble with him, precisely, was that he couldn't screw himself up to normal pitch. He couldn't think, as he'd been wont to do, through to a decision. He could only go running about in a fog, getting nowhere. The pain—the normal minimum pain—was not unbearably severe. If it had been anywhere but in his head, he thought, he could have ignored it and gone about his business. But this unremitting pressure against the inside of his skull stupefied him.

There were two or three fascinating half-solved prob-

lems on his desk and his drawing-board at which he could do no more than blankly stare. There were important questions of business policy to be settled, but when he sat in conference with Williamson and Corbett, he didn't more than half follow what they were talking about, and if he roused himself, with a spurt of temper, to take hold and wrest the lead away from them, the effort only started the hammers going again in his head.

The devil of it was, they could see there was something wrong with him. They looked at him, sometimes, with an appearance of concern, and Williamson, one day, with an air that was friendlier than any he'd pretended to of late, asked him why he didn't run off for a month's vacation, to Bermuda or somewhere. He scoffed at the suggestion —vacations, he said, weren't in his line—but it worried him. They were planning to put something over on him, most likely. He didn't even want a vacation. He rebuffed Jennie's sound advice that he take a week at French Lick, playing the roulette wheel or the little horses.

There was a girl in town, in one of the musical shows, with whom he'd had some rather vivid times in seasons past, but he felt no inclination, now, to look her up. She'd telephoned, one Sunday morning, and he'd told Anson to say he was out. Henry Craven had asked him once or twice to share his seats at the opera (Margaret had gone away again, this time to Italy), but he'd declined. There was nowhere he wanted to go, no one he had the smallest wish to see. He didn't want to know who the people were who called him on the telephone, let alone talk to them. Like a wounded bear, he had crawled into the darkest corner of his cave.

Weeks went by like that. Jennie and Henry Craven, who saw him daily at the office, gave up trying to cheer or even to interest him. They had been forced to the conclusion that the only thing to do was to let him alone and wait for this phase to pass.

Eventually it did. Quite by inadvertence, Joe found

his remedy in whisky. He would never have thought of it, for he did not consider alcohol as a drug, nor, hardly, the well seasoned Kentucky bourbon he had stocked so lavishly with the first threatened approach of prohibition, as an intoxicant. When he said to Henry, in the course of their first talk, that, having tried every sort of drink in the world, he had come to the conclusion that the most innocent of them was corn whisky, he was not trying, as Henry thought, to be witty or paradoxical; he was stating his honest opinion.

He drank it with all his meals but breakfast. He usually had a drink or two of it at the fag end of the afternoon, and if he were passing the evening domestically, reading or talking with a chance visitor, he drank it at intervals till bedtime. He rarely drank it convivially. When there was a party on, he turned to more sophisticated and stimulating beverages. The belief current among his companions in these affairs was that, no matter what he drank, Joe couldn't get drunk. He knew better, but it suited his egregious and overbearing humor to keep this knowledge to himself. He enjoyed being exceptional.

The dullness of those winter days after he had got his arm out of its sling and had begun going through the motions of living his normal life drove him insensibly to drinking rather more than his liberal ration of whisky, and from week to week the increase went on, without, for a long while, producing any effect to attract his attention. But there came a vile fog-bound sleety Sunday in the month of February when he sat from his late breakfast far into the afternoon, the litter of the Sunday papers he was too deeply bored to read around him, and the carafe and syphon at his elbow. About four o'clock Anson heard himself being called for in an excited tone that brought him in haste.

"Anson," Joe demanded, "do you see anything of that damned headache of mine lying around anywhere? Because, by God, I believe I've lost it!" His voice had a

ring in it that the man hadn't heard since before the accident.

Anson looked around, not because he expected to see a headache lying there, but because Joe had told him to. "I hope it has gone, sir," he said. "Have you been taking anything . . . ?" His glance had got round by that time to the carafe, and he broke off short.

"What do you mean—'taking anything'?" Joe demanded. His look followed the butler's and came to rest on the carafe.

"Nothing, sir, except that I filled that this morning—and it's rather low, now, sir."

Joe laughed out, "Rather low! I should say it was!" He shook his head tentatively and added, "That's funny. If I'd laughed like that this morning it would have started all the hammers going at once. Don't feel a thing now. Look here, Anson, would you say I was drunk?"

"Certainly not, sir." The man seemed shocked at the bare idea.

"I expect I am, though. Must be. The headache is, anyhow. Sunk. Drowned. Well, I'm glad I've got on to the trick of it. I'd have gone mad in another month. This way, we'll be able to manage. See?—God, what a relief!" He stretched, flexed his arms, kicked at the heap of papers that lay about his feet.

The dramatic section of one of them was disturbed by the movement and his eye fell upon a reproduced drawing of a good-looking young actress. He stooped and picked it up and began reading the interview which filled the rest of the page. He knew Ashleigh, the critic who wrote it, pretty well, and he grinned appreciatively over the wit and the subtlety of some of its implications. "Esther sounds like the same old girl," he remarked to Anson, who not having been dismissed was still standing by. "She always used to stop at the Congress. Call up and see if she's there now. If she is, I'll talk to her. I feel like having a party."

To Jennie, the change looked at first almost like a

miracle. He came breezing into the office like a man back from a long journey, with a word of unceremonious greeting to fling at everybody who crossed his path. He kept her and Henry gossiping half the morning in his private office. It was—or so it seemed at first—exactly as if he had been away ever since that November journey of his, when he had taken Trix with him, and was now back again—really back, his old self.

It wasn't long—certainly not a week—before Jennie's happiness over his recovery began to be clouded by a misgiving that it wasn't so real as it seemed. He only grinned at her when she demanded that she be told how the cure had been wrought—grinned at her with that gleam of boyish mischief in his eye that would have made a school-mistress want to shake him.

Jennie had never allowed herself to be teased into that attitude toward him, and she didn't try to scold or cross-examine him now; but privately she wondered.

No doubt, with his uncanny perceptions, he guessed that this was so, for within a day or two, serious but for the gleam in his eye, he assured her that there was nothing to it. There never was anything the matter with him but that damned headache, and it quit all at once, about four o'clock last Sunday afternoon. "How should I know why? You act as if it was something you hoped I would leave you in my will!"

She wasn't at all convinced, and it struck her that she would like some time to ask Doctor Bennett if a thing could happen like that. Of course she never would; clear meddling that would be. She even concealed her doubts from Henry, though they grew graver, and drew nearer to being certainties all the while.

One thing she had been quick to note: Joe let his drawing-board severely alone. The design for the flax harvester he had been playing with was no farther along than it had been last summer; and nothing new had interrupted to take its place.

He remained curiously indifferent, too, to the more

broadly political aspects of the business. The Greer Company was under contract to buy the entire output of the newly organized subsidiary companies, and if this ran into anything like the tonnage they expected, the problem of marketing it would be, it seemed to Jennie, serious. They would have what amounted to a new product, that must be made either to adapt itself to existing channels of trade or to cut new ones. A revolutionary matter any way you looked at it. The figures it involved ran up into millions of dollars.

Joe would not put his back into this dawning phase of the business. He agreed with a good deal of what Jennie was saying, but he yawned as he listened and he always finished the discussion by saying that it was a problem of supply, not of demand. The important thing was to get those little mills ready in time for the next crop.

3

"Speaking of vacations," Joe broke out, though this was not precisely what they had been speaking of, "Henry, here, is the man who needs one. He looks like the devil to me. Doesn't he to you?"

John Williamson, to whom the question was directed, looked thoughtfully for a moment at his cousin by marriage, and said he believed Joe was right. The three men were lunching together. The month was still February; Joe's alcohol cure was in its earliest phase; and what they had been talking about was his astonishing return to health.

Henry denied conscientiously that he was ill, beyond the chronic cold which every one was likely to pick up in the fag end of the winter—and certainly no one could pretend that he was overworked. But the thought of a vacation was one he couldn't repudiate very heartily.

Any change of scene would be welcomed as giving him a chance to stop worrying for a while. Very likely he would not succeed in breaking the habit altogether. He recognized that thinking in circles was a constitutional vice,

but since last summer—to be precise, since that evening when he had dined with John and Violet at Lake Forest, and learned of Violet's quarrel with Joe, and caught the sinister implication in John's instructions to him—Henry had carried this vice of worrying to an excess which he was forced to recognize as serious. It was hounding him into a chronic insomnia; it was debilitating his own judgment—or at least shaking his confidence in it, which came to the same thing.

This luncheon to-day afforded an illustration. It was one of a series of steps in a friendly advance on John's part toward a man with whom he had severed, a few months back, all but the most necessary business relations. The advance had become perceptible soon after Violet had gone away, taking Margaret with her, to Italy. Henry wondered what that advance meant. It might be nothing but the natural rebound of John's innate kindliness, now that Violet was off the board, toward a likable chap who had been hard hit by a double stroke of misfortune. It might have occurred to John to wonder how he would have felt if, simultaneously with a disabling accident to himself, Dodo, were to have run off with Jeffrey.

On the surface, it looked like that to Henry. He had never known John pleasanter than he was at lunch to-day—but mightn't it be a part of a deliberate campaign to keep Joe seated firmly on the rails that had been greased to his foreseen destruction? When the time came for them to hand Henry the part he was expected to play in their little drama of financial assassination—if they did hand it to him—what would he do? Would he have the courage to tell them to go to hell? It literally made him sweat whenever he asked himself that question—and he had asked it almost daily for months.

But for that question, he would be happier than he had ever been since his father's death. Life was kindlier than it had ever been. It had been wonderful, for instance, to be able to say, when Violet invited Margaret to go to Italy with her as her guest, that this arrangement would

not be necessary, and to go and buy her steamship tickets himself. The thought of subjecting Margaret to a reversion from that to the old shifting dependence was intolerable; yet this was what a defiance of John and a refusal to play his part would mean. Round and round that grizzly maypole his thoughts danced in a contracting spiral. Damn it, why couldn't he stop? He wasn't doing anybody any good.

It made him nervous now to have the two men looking at him, though there was nothing but good will in their faces. "Anyhow," he concluded, after denying that he needed a vacation, "I can't think of any place I particularly want to go. The annual meeting is coming in a few weeks, and I should have to be back for that. There wouldn't be time, really, to go anywhere."

"You could get to Tokio and back before the meeting, if you wanted to," Joe contradicted. "Why don't you go there? You'd have time to pick a few cherry blossoms, and so on."

"I'll tell you what you might do," John put in, speaking more seriously. "Go to Mentone and spend a couple of weeks with Violet and Margaret. Take them over to Nice for *mi-careme*. You'd just about hit it, I think. I wish you would do that, for a fact. I'd like a first-hand report on Violet." The speaker glanced aside to Joe as he went on to explain, "She hasn't been very well this winter—wasn't at least before she went away, and her letters don't answer my questions."

Joe answered with a proper assumption of concern that he was sorry to hear Mrs. Williamson had not been well; and there the subject dropped, leaving Henry sunk in a maze of conjecture as to John's reason for bringing Violet into the talk.

As they left the lunch table, John went back quite seriously to the project of Henry's vacation. "Think it over," he commanded. "There isn't a reason on earth, is there" (the question was directed to Joe), "why he shouldn't run over to the Riviera for a couple of weeks?"

"Not that I know of," said Joe. And he added with a

grin, "I'll stand without hitching for that long. Give you my word, I will."

"It's all nonsense," Henry protested fretfully, as he and Joe walked back to the office together. "I couldn't get passage for weeks. Those Mediterranean boats are crowded this time of the year."

"Leave that to me," said Joe; and half an hour later he brought into Henry's office a memorandum of the number of his berth, the name of his steamer, and the date of his sailing from New York.

"Go to the photographer down-stairs now and get mugged for your passport; then you can put in your application to-morrow."

Henry, in a daze, obeyed.

Until his steamer cast off from the wharf in New York ten days later, Henry's mind did not fully accept the fact that he was going to Europe again, after all these years. To glimpse the Azores; buy oranges and things from the old women who would come aboard at Gibraltar; gaze once more upon the Chateau d'If whence they had chucked Monte Cristo into the sea; hear the banging of the guns while they shot pigeons at Monte Carlo; sit out in the Mediterranean sunshine under a green-lined pongee umbrella, watching the idle world go by—himself as idle as the best of them. He was embarked for that, when a fortnight ago . . . It was queer the way Joe sent you spinning off on some tangent or other whenever you touched him.

He had an even two weeks from the day he landed at Marseilles to the day when he must set sail for home from Genoa, and he feared he disappointed and offended Margaret by electing to devote the whole of his time to the little strip of sun-drenched and mountain-sheltered paradise which lay between these two cities. He rejected with unconcealed horror, Margaret's suggestion that he make a dash north through France, for a day or two in Paris, and a short tour of the battle-fields; and he dealt almost as shortly with the compromise she offered, a trip across to Venice, upon which she said she would accompany him.

"I'm going to stay right here in the sun," he said, with a decisiveness which amazed her. "I'm going to pretend that the rest of Europe is just the way it was twenty years ago, and that I've got all the time and all the money that I need. That's the secret of the Riviera. It's the one place I know in the world where you can do that."

It was in Violet's presence that he made this declaration of independence, and Margaret couldn't say much. Later, when she got her brother by himself, she remonstrated with him seriously. His coming over at all for so short a time seemed to her a piece of unwarranted extravagance. But his refusal to make the most of the little time he had was simply perverse. It wasn't like him. "It's like that horrible man Greer," she went on. "I hope you aren't trying to imitate him."

Henry laughed. "Joe's suggestion was," he commented, "that I run over to Tokio and pick a few cherry blossoms."

"Cherry blossoms!" Margaret echoed, with a shudder of disgust. "I know what he meant by that as well as you do."

"He meant cherry blossoms," Henry said quietly. "If he had meant Geisha girls, or whatever the polite name for them is, he would have said so in so many words. Poor old Joe! I wish you would let him alone. He has been pretty hard hit this winter."

"Well, I hope *you* let him alone," she retorted; "especially before Violet. She could tell you a few things about him if she wanted to."

"Has she been telling them to you?" Henry asked; but Margaret denied that this was the case.

"You've changed somehow," she concluded. "You aren't the same person you were a year ago—whether it's due to Mr. Greer or to somebody else."

"Who else?" Henry wondered, but he didn't ask. Anyhow, Margaret acquiesced with a pretty good grace after that in the frivolous régime of his vacation. He began with a lucky day at Monte Carlo, winning nearly four

thousand francs. This frightened him away from the *salle de jeu* for the rest of his stay, but it enabled him to play the host to the two women with just the degree of modest lavishness that suited him, and with a comfortable conscience. Even Margaret could see the experience was doing him good—refreshing him, filling him out, brightening his eyes and lending timbre to his voice.

For once, there was a reversal of rôles between him and Violet. Henry had never seen her look faded before. Time had seemed to pass over her frictionless, leaving no mark upon her whatever; but now, it was as if some obscure reagent had been at work, bringing the old marks out.

He had been pretty skeptical of the ill health which had been alleged as the reason for her going abroad just after Christmas. Mere restlessness, he had taken it to be. Boredom with the endless bridge she played. Perhaps the hope of picking up another barytone—or even Fournier himself. Henry had bestowed what sympathy he had to spare in that direction upon John.

It was plain to him now, though the surface she showed was as crisp and finely finished as ever, that she was profoundly unhappy. Was she ill, he wondered? Was some threat hanging over her which she dared not look in the face? Anyhow, he was sorry for her, and on the tide of this sympathy there came back his old affection for her, half cousinly, half romantic. He betrayed it candidly, undeterred by his sister's good-natured—or almost good-natured—scorn of this relapse.

He was careful whenever he was with Violet to avoid saying anything that even slanted toward Joe Greer. He had been strongly impressed that this was a sensitive point which must not even be approached. But for this conviction, he would have thought more than once that she had given him a lead toward Joe. Certainly, wishing to avoid him as she did, she showed less than her characteristic tact in sometimes asking questions or recalling incidents that would lead the unwary into his neighborhood.

On the morning of his last day but one in Mentone, as the three of them sat idly after breakfast, looking out over the Mediterranean, Henry said, "Two weeks from to-day I shall be looking out at Lake Michigan from my office window, and it may be just as blue and nice as this—or it may be buried in a snow-storm. There is no monotony about it back there, anyhow."

"I'm going back with you," Violet said. "I wish you'd go in and telegraph to Cook's to hold a cabin for me. We can all run up to Nice this morning and buy my ticket."

"You don't mean that, Violet!" Margaret cried.

Violet nodded. "I spent most all last night packing," she said. "I couldn't sleep."

There was a long silence, blank with the astonishment of her two auditors, electric, on Violet's part, with an unaccountable emotion. "I know it's horrid," she burst out again, "but I can't help it. I've got to go back and see John. There are some things I want to talk with him about." She managed, as she turned to Margaret, a short laugh and a drier, more matter-of-fact manner. "If I stayed here another two months, as we'd planned, you'd get to hating the sight of me. I suppose Henry will before he gets me to New York, but he's so soft hearted, he'll forgive me."

"I promised Portia Novelli I'd buy some things for her in Italy," Margaret said, "—furniture and glass, mostly—and I think she's counting on it. I don't see how I can . . . If you'd just told me a couple of weeks ago, even . . ."

But Margaret mustn't even think of giving up the rest of the trip to come home with her, Violet interrupted, excitedly. It would be too silly! Of course she must go on and carry out the plans the pair of them had made together. It wasn't merely a matter of carrying out Portia's commissions. Harriet Aldrich was expecting them in Rome, and with old friends like Anne Duncan and her husband right here in Mentone, Margaret wouldn't feel abandoned, would she?

Henry was uneasily aware that Violet's volubility was not producing the effect it aimed at with Margaret. If she said much more, Margaret would make it an affair of conscience, decide that Violet needed her, and cut her own vacation short. Either that, or begin thinking Violet was trying to get rid of her! He knew his sister extraordinarily well.

He now interposed to say that Portia's commissions did not strike him as important enough to go to Italy for, in case Margaret, herself, had had enough of Europe for the present, and felt like coming back with them. It would be awfully nice to have her at home once more. She had better take a day to think it over, then decide on the sole basis of her own preference. He was sure there would be room on the steamer homeward bound at this time of year.

When he was alone, he questioned his own motives for this interposition a little uneasily. Had he been wholly unselfish in trying to save Margaret from being worried or provoked into making a decision contrary to her real choice, or was it perhaps true that the prospect of ten days at sea alone with Violet attracted him—the aftermath of that old romance? He was able, however, to interrupt this train of thought with the audacious reflection that it didn't in the least matter what his motives had been. What he had done had been to make it possible for Margaret to choose for herself. If it worked out to giving a little extra fillip to his enjoyment of his vacation, where was the harm?

Margaret decided she would stay on, long enough at least to do Portia's shopping for her. She was really getting interested in the possibilities of the decorating and furnishing business, she said, especially since knocking around New England with Portia last summer. She knew, it happened, quite a lot about Italian stuff, and if her purchases were as sound as she hoped they would be, who knew but it might result in her getting a commission to come over again next year—possibly in her going in with Portia as a partner?

She went down to Genoa to see Henry and Violet off, and left them with a humorous injunction to be as sentimental as they liked. She would feel a lot safer about Henry, she concluded, tied to Violet's innocent apron strings than ranging about Chicago on the loose.

When the flurry of departure was over, and they were seated side by side in their deck chairs, Violet reverted to that last remark of Margaret's, and commented upon it. "I think it does frighten her a little—the people you've been playing around with in Chicago lately."

"I suppose your opinion of those people is the same as hers," he said, after waiting half a minute to take thought. Then, "Look here, Violet, do you want me to talk about this? You made it pretty clear to me one night last summer, I thought, that you didn't."

She said quickly in rather a thin voice, "I don't want to talk about anything, Henry, except how nice and blue the sky is, and whether we shall have a chance to go ashore at Gibraltar, and what time it is when they ring five bells. Unless you feel like remembering old times—and holding my hand once in a while. Not being sentimental about us, the way we are now, you know, but about the pair of kids we were that summer in France. Gracious, what a time ago that seems! I'll bet you've forgotten all about it."

He did not hold her hand, since it was his observation of her that she didn't always like to be taken literally when she threw out invitations like that; but he did with smiling gravity set about disproving her assertion that he had forgotten. He recalled a day at Chenonceau when, tired of Diane de Poictiers, they had given the others the slip, and embarked on the Cher in a canoe he found.

He noticed she was not contributing much to their common stock of reminiscences. Either she had forgotten a good deal, or she didn't care to acknowledge her memories; and it was with an enthusiasm suggestive of relief that she greeted a pair of promenaders walking by. New York people they were—parents of a girl in Dorothy's class at

Thornycroft. She hadn't known before that they were aboard.

"Thank heaven," she cried, "now we can have some bridge!"

They didn't see much of the Mediterranean after that, nor the blue sky; and they pretty well ignored Gibraltar, though they swung for hours in the very shadow of it.

Henry didn't mind. To his astonishment, he found himself enjoying the smoke-room. His knowledge of bridge had always been sound, and the weakness of his play temperamental. What made the difference now was the hundred dollars or so that was left of his winnings at Monte Carlo. This was velvet. He could lose it with a clear conscience. When it was lost, he would stop playing.

But he didn't lose. For days he consistently held better than average hands, and he played them resolutely—for all they were worth. Meanwhile, he had followed the others in putting his sovereign into the ship's pool. For several days the numbers he drew seemed to him unlikely, and he didn't bid them in. But at last one night, when they weren't more than two days out of New York, he drew a number that struck him as propitious, and fortified by another good day at the bridge table, protected it though it cost him around twenty pounds to do so. It was the last pool on the voyage, and the play was high.

He wasn't particularly surprised, when the run was posted just before lunch next day, to find that he had won. Somehow, he had thought he would; but he was shocked at the amount of his winnings. Heavens, there was enough here to pay for his whole trip, and a good deal of Margaret's in the bargain!

It was hard not to act apologetic about it, and to ride down a misgiving that some of the other passengers might be wondering if he wasn't a professional gambler.

Violet hadn't appeared yet that day, and after lunch he permitted himself to be involved in a strictly masculine bridge game, which he sat down to in the unavowed hope of

losing some of his guilty gains. The cards ran strongly his way, however, and he went right on winning, though the game was protracted straight through the dinner hour and on into the evening.

After dinner, Violet appeared in the smoke-room with her two New York friends and an odd man—a bearded foreigner in some diplomatic service or other—and this four started a game of their own.

Toward eleven o'clock, the steward brought Henry a note from Violet. "Come and get me out of this," it read. "I can't stand any more of it."

"I hate beards," she said, as he steadied her across the high sill to the companionway. "I don't see why people wear them." It was an unpleasant night—misty, splashed with occasional squalls of rain, and the dark decks were almost deserted. She spoke as if her teeth were chattering with cold; and he wondered in frank perplexity what he was going to do with her.

"You aren't well," he said. "What you really ought to do is take a big drink of whisky, and turn in."

"Turn in!" she echoed derisively. "Go to sleep like a good child and forget my nonsense—and feel all right in the morning? You aren't going to be rid of me as easily as that. Come down with me while I get my fur coat and an extra rug or two; and then we'll find a couple of chairs in a dry corner, and be comfortable."

She had a big outside cabin, one deck down, which opened by means of a short transverse corridor right out on deck. At this outer door, he stopped.

"Come on in," she commanded, "and help me carry out the things. You haven't seen my room, anyway, have you? It's rather nice."

She was feeling her way ahead of her in the dark. Now she switched on a shaded lamp on the night stand. It was a charming room, fantastically big for a steamer's cabin—brass bed, chaise longue, easy chairs, even (ludicrously) a fireplace. He exclaimed at it in admiration.

"It would be nice," she said, "if we could sit and talk

right here." But then, at the look in his face, she laughed. "I don't mean it, Henry, so don't get frightened. It's no good starting a scandal unless you're going to have a run for your money."

She pulled her big fur coat out of the wardrobe, as she spoke, let him help her into it, indicated the rugs he was to bring along, and switched off the light. He waited until she was clear of the door before he attempted to follow her out, and he heard her give another short laugh when, after a moment's hesitation, she had preceded him. They found a pair of chairs just outside her window. After he had tucked her up in the rug, he asked whether he shouldn't go, after all, and get the drink he had spoken of.

"No," she said, "whisky wouldn't do me any good tonight. I'm not cold, anyhow. Sit down. I don't want you to go away." She added, after he had wrapped his own rug around him and settled himself beside her, "I'm afraid. That's all the matter with me."

She didn't immediately answer when he asked quickly, "What of?"

"I have been wanting to talk to you all the way across. That's why I got rid of Margaret, and came away with you. Now we're nearly to New York and I haven't talked to you yet. I knew unless I did something desperate tonight, I wouldn't."

"You don't mean," he said, with a laugh, "that you've been afraid of me? Why, good heavens, I'm—only Henry!"

She echoed, "Only Henry," and matched his laugh. "I should think you'd have hated me all these years. I would have if I'd been you. You aren't 'only Henry' though, any more. I guess that's why I've been afraid of you. You're different, somehow. I didn't notice it at Mentone, when Margaret was talking about it, but since we've been on the boat, I've seen it plainly enough. You're a terrific bridge player. I don't believe John ever won as much money on a trip as you must have."

He remarked that no one could be more surprised at this phenomenon than he, himself. "But it isn't that I am different," he went on reflectively. "I've been admiring some people all my life for their nerve, wishing I could be courageous and resolute as they were. I've just found out how easy it is to play the game that way when you're doing it all the while on velvet. If I had happened to lose the hundred francs that I had decided to blow in on a little thrill at Monte Carlo, I would have gone right on being the same harmless little piker—that's the word, isn't it?—that you've always known me for. But I never did lose it. I was always ahead. I had quite a little of it left—money that I didn't think of as really mine, you know—when we came aboard. I had meant to turn it over to Margaret, but I didn't somehow. Now, of course, I've still got it—it and a whole lot more. I've never really had anything at stake, you see."

He ended a reflective pause with a short laugh. "Up in the smoke-room to-day when the steward posted the run, I saw a little Englishman admiring me for my unconcern over winning a great lot of money like that. I thought it was ridiculous that he should, until it came over me that a lot of people I had envied and admired for their nerve were really just like me—just like what I happened for this once to be, I mean. People who have nothing at stake; people, some of them, who have never been on anything but velvet all their lives. It must be rather an easy game to play, I think—the whole game of success—when there isn't any real penalty for losing."

"People like John, you mean," she interrupted, and startled him into a horrified disclaimer. He had never thought of John like that.

"It's true, however," she said flatly. "It really is true of most of us stall-fed people. And you've been thrown with us always; never had a chance to get away from us until lately. But you've kept up your courage and never complained about how hard it must have been. Henry, have you got a good big handkerchief? Oh, don't

you care! I was sure to have cried about something to-night."

She went on after she had wiped her eyes and got her voice under control again. "Anyhow, you *are* different. I don't believe you'd ever have thought of a thing like that if you hadn't known Joe Greer. He hates us, I think. I know he despises us.—Doesn't he? Hasn't he told you so?"

It struck him as strange that he wasn't surprised at her deliberately bringing Joe's name into their talk—let alone upon this note. It seemed to him now that he had known from the first whom she had wanted to talk with him about. Not as Margaret's "that man Greer," either. As Joe. He answered her question rather at random, aware that it didn't matter what he said. It wasn't information she wanted.

"Joe is a good deal of a boy in some ways," he said. "I don't believe his bite is ever as bad as his bark; and as far as I know, he has never even barked at you. He used to turn loose pretty gorgeously on the subject of John every now and then, but he hasn't been doing that lately. They seemed on the best of terms when I left Chicago. It was when we were all three having lunch together that they talked me into this vacation."

He heard her draw in a long tremulous breath, and on a quite genuine impulse of affection, he reached under her rug and found her hand.

"Come along with the talk," he commanded. "I can't seem very formidable to you, even though I did win the pool to-day."

"John is the person I ought to talk to," she said, "but I never can do it. I've been having some awfully queer feelings about John lately. They're what I'm frightened about, I suppose. I've always known him so well, you see. Twenty years—more than half my life. We've got on awfully well—as well as any two people ever do, I guess. He has been frightfully kind to me. Generous, and considerate, too—in ways that lots of husbands aren't

from what I hear. And of course everybody thinks the world of him—men and women—you and the Whitneys, and the Crawfords, and Rose and Rodney—everybody that really knows him. He's an old peach. I'm a lot luckier than I deserve to be, I guess. But lately, he's looked different to me, somehow."

"How's he changed?" Henry asked.

"That's it. He hasn't changed a bit. He's always been just the way I see him now. There are some things he never could understand. There's one he misunderstands now—and the more he tries to make it right, the worse it gets; and the more I try to make him let it alone, the more he misunderstands. It's about that quarrel I had with Mr. Greer last summer." She added quickly, forestalling his attempt to speak, "It isn't him I care about. It's John. You know about it, I suppose?"

"A little," Henry admitted.

"Did he tell you about it," she demanded sharply, "or was it John?"

"Joe never mentioned the thing. John gave me his view of it the night we went to Ravinia to hear *Thais*."

"His view!" Violet echoed bitterly. "Well, that's the whole trouble. I'm going to tell you what really happened. It isn't very nice to talk about. I was furious with him." (Henry frowned in the dark, and then perceived that "him" unless otherwise explained had its antecedent in Joe Greer.) "I never was angrier in my life—nor had a better right to be. Because of course he is a terrible outsider in lots of ways. And the people he goes with—the women—chorus-girls and corset models! And he never bothers to make any pretense about it. There isn't one scrap of niceness in him, that way. So of course, with him, it was natural enough—the thing that happened, I mean. It was my fault in a way, because I might have known. Only when you're with him, you forget that side of him."

She stuck fast at that point for a minute or two, but Henry, without trying to prompt her, sat still and waited

—and continued to hold her hand. He had to overcome a tendency also to hold his own breath.

“Why, this is what happened,” she went on at last. “We were driving along in his car, you know, with the curtain down because of the cloud-burst, and we slid off the road and couldn’t go on for a while. He got the idea that I was trying to flirt with him. I don’t mean that exactly—worse than that. He thought I was making—advances to him. Like one of his beastly chorus-girls, I suppose.” She uttered a ragged little laugh. “He was shocked! He began preaching me a sermon. I didn’t know what he meant at first. How should I? When I saw what was in his mind—the beastly rotten thing that was in his mind—I felt as if he had thrown me out in the mud and was wiping his feet on me. I told him if he said another word, I’d get out of the car and go find somebody to come back and kill him. I felt like killing him myself. Well, he stopped then, and after a while it cleared a little, and we went on and caught up with John and Dorothy.

“He wanted to go into the house and see John, he said. I don’t know what he meant to do. You never can tell, with him, what he will do. He may have wanted to make his little speech to John. I suppose he was as angry by that time as I was. Or perhaps he only wanted to go in and look at him—register virtue. But I knew if he did go in, something would happen. And he kept on meaning to do it right up to the very door. It was the most horrible thing that ever happened to me. At the very last second before John opened the door, he went back to the car and drove off.

“It left me looking like a wreck. I couldn’t help that. I was simply speechless for a while—what with Dodo looking on, and all. Scared half to death, the child was. Maybe if I could have talked to John alone, then, I could have told him what really happened; but it wouldn’t have been especially easy even then. Men are a lot alike in those things. But with Dodo there, it wasn’t possible.

"Afterward, I did try to talk to John about it. I said we had had a quarrel, and gone into the ditch; and it was going into the ditch that rattled me, I said. I hated Joe and never wanted to see him again; but I gave John my solemn word that nothing had happened, and there was nothing to make a fuss about. I wanted the whole thing let alone, and I wanted to be let alone about it.

"But you see, John wouldn't let it alone. He couldn't, I suppose. He hasn't got a quick temper—like mine or Joe Greer's. He just keeps on stewing—slow but sure. I knew what he thought. He thought Joe had tried to take some horrible advantage of me. But I couldn't very well explain that he hadn't. You can see that, can't you? Besides, I didn't want to explain. I didn't want to talk about him at all. I was just about as furious with him, I guess, as I would have been over what John thought it was. Of course, I suppose *he* thinks that's what I told John—a regular Potiphar's wife affair.

"I don't care about that; really, I don't, Henry. It's John that's driving me wild about it. He means to get even with Joe. He as good as told me so, by way of making me feel all right about it again. I don't have to worry, he says. He is going to get his deserts. But do you know how I believe he means to get even?" She tried to laugh, but sobbed instead. "By taking his money away from him, or fixing it so he can't get rich out of your beastly linen company. I don't know anything, really. It's just hints. I am to be patient, and wait and see—and it will all come right. Right!"

"Well, there you are. I guess you've got it all now. Maybe you can see how I feel about John." Her hold on Henry's hand tightened into a frenzied clutch. "If John thought what he does think, and if he really cared for me, myself, he'd take Joe Greer out and shoot him. But he's going to take his money away from him instead,—and keep it! And it's just what John *would* do, Henry. That is the horrible thing I've come to see. Can you imagine how it will look to Joe when it has all happened? Can

you see what he'll think about both of us, John and me? Well, I think just about the same thing he will. That's what I'm thinking now."

Always the first thing in Henry to respond to any appeal was his tenderness. He saw Violet's predicament—part of it, anyhow. Incidentally, it was hours before he perceived his own. "I'm sure," he began, "that John believes exactly what you told him, and what he afterward told me—that Joe had not committed or attempted any crime; that he had done nothing, I mean, that required to be acted upon. He was angry with himself, first of all, so he said to me, for having put you in a position where an unpleasant experience could happen to you; and I think he was held back from doing anything overt by his feeling that you wouldn't want it done that way. And then you've got to remember that he's John, just as much as Joe's Joe. There isn't the slightest doubt he cares for you."

"Who?" she asked sharply. Then in the same breath, "Oh, John you mean. Yes, of course he does—in his way."

"It's the only way he has," Henry remarked, a little at random, for that "who" of hers had startled him.

"Henry," she asked, after a silence, "has he ever said anything about me to you at all since the day he was hurt, and that daughter of his eloped in an aeroplane?"

To the best of his memory, he told her, Joe had not said a word.

"Because," she explained, "I did a rather crazy thing. I went to see him about a week after it happened. His butler came to the door and said Mr. Greer wasn't seeing anybody. I didn't leave a card or anything, but I'm sure the man knows me. I wondered if he had told Joe. It seemed as if I had to do something."

"The thing you've got to do," Henry said, "for your own peace of mind, is to talk to John. Explain the whole thing; tell him what really happened in the car that day, just as you've told it to me."

"I can't tell him," she answered desperately. "Not now; he wouldn't believe me. Think how it would look after all these months! He'd think I had fallen in love with Joe, and was trying to shield him. It's idiotic of course, but that's what he'd think. Any man would—any husband. No, I've told it to you, and you're the only person I could possibly tell it to. You've got to talk to John yourself.—Or to somebody."

Of course there could be no doubt what "somebody" she meant. Henry was touched by the almost childish naivete of this. He felt frightfully sorry for Violet, but he hadn't at the time taken very seriously her apparent intention to involve him in the matter. She brought this home to him though, two days later when they parted in New York. She was stopping off for a day or two to visit Dorothy at school, while Henry of course was going straight through to Chicago. She prolonged their final handshake to say, "You're a dear, Henry, to come to the rescue with John and Mr. Greer. I've begun sleeping again since you said you'd fix it up for me. I don't care whom you talk to, you know, as long as you tell somebody. I don't deserve to have you kind to me like that. That's the way you are. Good-by. I'll see you in Chicago as soon as I come back."

She was gone before her cousin, bewildered at first, and then aghast, could utter a disclamatory word.

4

It is to be hoped that Violet had slept that night, for Henry in his berth on the Chicago train lay broad awake till morning, thinking anything but kindly thoughts of his confiding cousin. That the thing she, without disguise, expected him to do looked no doubt simple enough to her, was a minor exasperation in his dilemma.

Violet had not meant to make Joe look like a criminal in her husband's eyes. She had assured him, in fact, that this was not the case; but she hadn't been able to uproot John's misconception. John persisted in regarding Joe

as an enemy. John was planning to get even with him through the channels of business—the precise method of his attack unknown—and Joe was to take warning, and look out for himself. This was the substance of what Violet wanted Henry to tell Joe as soon as he reached Chicago.

Simple enough, as far as Violet could see. What she couldn't see—and her vestigial sense of fair play would never have given her a hint of it—was the price Henry would have to pay. To square this procedure with his own obligatory loyalty to John, he would have to go to John and tell him substantially what he had done; acknowledge, in other words, that he had gone over to the enemy. Such an admission would justify John in calling him a turncoat, a traitor, and an ungrateful whelp. It would justify him, too, in stripping Henry summarily of his job, and chucking him out in a cold world to fend for himself. It was exactly the situation that he had caught a glimpse of one summer night last year, and had shrunk from as a nightmare.

To Violet, of course, he owed no such sacrifice as this. It would be simple idiocy to make it—for her. He would be fully justified in telling her, or in writing her a note to say, that he could not undertake the errand she had charged him with, and that she had mistaken him if she thought he had agreed to do it. There was nothing more to it than that, as far as Violet was concerned. But it wasn't Violet that he was concerned about. It was poor old Joe.

He had tried often enough, but never successfully, to account for the warmth of affection for Joe that had grown up in him during the past year. It was not based on gratitude. John Williamson was the person he had been grateful to for half his life, while Joe had never gone out of his way appreciably to be of service to him. Still less was it based on congruities of taste and temper. It would hardly be possible to find two men more widely different, if one judged by their surfaces anyhow, than he and Joe.

Surfaces were perhaps misleading. Henry had often recalled their first talk together, which Joe had begun by asking him to explain John Williamson. Henry could still recall the surprising sensation he had of being understood, taken at an unwonted value. This sense, though it has ceased to be surprising, had never faded to the point where he was unconscious of it. He had never left Joe, even after the briefest encounter without being aware of an enhanced confidence in himself. Margaret made no bones of calling this feeling of his an infatuation. Joe flattered him, she said, deliberately; and she sometimes implied that this was being done for a sinister purpose.

This, with due deference to Margaret's opinion, Henry knew to be nonsense. Just as unadulterated nonsense as some of the ideas Margaret entertained about Jennie Mac-Arthur. Joe wouldn't take the trouble to flatter anybody. Candor was outstanding among his qualities, and was often carried to outrageous lengths. No, Joe liked him; was his friend; had been from the day of their first meeting. Whatever the basis of it, there the thing was—not to be explained away. It was unique, too, in Henry's experience. He had never formed a friendship of just that quality with any other man.

Well, this was what the situation boiled down to—a choice between technical loyalty to John and his real loyalty to Joe Greer. It wasn't fair to blame Violet for his quandary. She didn't enter into the situation at all. She had told him nothing about John's intentions in their talk on deck that night, that John himself had not made clear to him—clear enough at least—the night they had heard *Thais* at Ravinia. For the present, John had said, it wasn't feasible to get rid of Joe. He would be indispensable to their enterprise, at least for another year. Henry, meanwhile, was to keep on good terms with him, quiet his suspicions, see that he didn't, as John put it, leave the rails.

And Henry, without spoken protest, had received the instructions! It would be fair to say, he supposed, that

he had acted upon them. Certainly he had given Joe no intimation of anything amiss. He had worried himself half sick about it, to be sure. But there was no merit in that; none that Joe would be able to see when the mine—whatever it was—that they were planting under him should be sprung.

It was a rotten situation. Intolerable, whatever the alternative consequences should turn out to be. He would put an end to it somehow as soon as he reached Chicago—before the annual meeting. Their mine likely enough was timed to go off upon that occasion. That may have been John's reason for packing him off to Europe. A week from now—oh, sooner than that; next Monday morning—he would be out looking for a job.

He dared not let himself think about that. When he glanced ahead at that prospect, the plan of action that was crystallizing in his mind seemed not so much terrifying as sheerly absurd—the stuff of a nightmare rather than a sober reality. The shape of his plan derived from something he had said to Violet. The person to talk to, he had told her, was John, himself. He would take a dose of his own medicine. It would be infinitely harder, of course, to defy John than it would be to warn Joe; but easier than it would be to confess to John after he had warned Joe.

In a moment of weakness a third alternative occurred to him. Suppose instead of going to either of them, he were to consult Jennie! She had been on the ground all the while; she was extraordinarily astute; she might already have seen through the plan, assuming there was a plan, against Joe's fortunes, and warned the boss to be on his guard. Even if she had not, a word or two—the most impalpable sort of hint—would be enough, because it wasn't as if Henry really knew anything.

It was with a burst of honest anger that he cast this pusillanimous project out of his mind. It was no good thinking about it any longer. There was one, and just one, decent thing for him to do—and this was to go to John.

He didn't know just what he would say—or how he would begin. That would have to be left to the moment.

As it turned out, no amount of preparation or rehearsing would have done Henry any good, for John took all the wind out of his sails in the first two minutes. There was no waiting in the outer office this time. The moment his name went in, Rollie Mill came out, and with the ceremonious gravity of a good undertaker, took him straight back into the innermost of John's offices.

"I'm glad you turned up to-day," John said. "I was afraid Violet might have persuaded you to wait and come on with her—and I wanted a talk with you as soon as I could get it. Greer's put one over on us, Henry. A smooth first-class job, right under our noses. He'll go into Saturday's meeting with an absolute voting control of the stock."

"I hope," Henry said blankly (and quite sincerely too. He was completely disorientated by this kaleidoscopic change in the situation)—"I hope it isn't due to something that I have overlooked."

"Lord, no," John assured him. "It isn't your fault. You voted with us on it. No; we sawed ourselves off with the limb, while he stood by and told us he wished we wouldn't. Greer's got the stock we issued to that fake inventor."

He went on, after an interval of purely emotional comment on the situation, to tell Henry how they had put out a feeler or two to determine whether this stock was in the market. It was only a natural thing to do. If anybody was going to get those shares, they preferred it to be themselves. Something about the way in which their advances were received had led them to suspect that there was something beneath the surface; so Gregory Corbett had managed to get in personal touch with the inventor, the pretext being that Gregory wished to discuss some of the technical points about the process with him. Well, according to Greg, the man didn't understand the process, himself. A rather shrewd sort of hick, he was! no educa-

tion at all, and really a little nutty about cornstalks. He hadn't the least glimmer of an understanding of bacteriology. That made it plain, of course, that, he, himself, never could have invented the process he had patented, and they had paid him for. They looked him up pretty carefully through their local banking connections; found he had never had any money at all until along last August, when he cashed a Chicago draft for ten thousand dollars. Plain enough where he got it, of course.

"We had him up here and went after him hammer and tongs to buy that stock. He claimed right up to the last minute that he had the stock, and that he was the inventor of the process we had infringed; but we made him an offer at last that brought the sweat right out on him. Then he caved in and admitted that the shares weren't his any more. He couldn't get them for us, he said, if we offered him all the money in Chicago. So we know where they are, all right. They are locked up in Joe Greer's strong box.

"But what we don't know is what he is going to do Saturday at the meeting. I wrote him a letter day before yesterday to feel him out. Said we would be very glad to reelect the whole directorate, and asked him if that would be satisfactory to him. I got an answer from him this morning, saying it would; but of course we don't know whether he'll play fair or not.

"We've got to pretend we think so. The only protection we've got for the present is that he doesn't know that we know he's got that stock—at least I don't believe he knows. That dummy inventor of his will be afraid to tell him. As long as Greer thinks we are unsuspicious, he may let things ride for a while. You'll treat him as if nothing had happened, of course. Keep your eyes open, and tell me if he lets anything slip. Have you seen him since you got home?"

"No," Henry said blankly. "I thought I would come straight to you, first."

"Glad you did," said John, getting up by way of end-

ing the audience. "But you had better go over and hook up with him as soon as you can. We are depending on you from now on, you know." This was genially, almost humorously, said, but it rattled Henry worse than ever.

"I don't think you ought to rely on me," he began miserably.

But John, with a laugh and a thump on the back, cut him short. "Don't you worry about it," he said. "Did you have a good trip? How's Violet looking? She wired me from New York that she was feeling a whole lot better. She's coming home Friday, I believe."

Evidently she did, for she telephoned Henry Friday night, apparently for the mere cousinly purpose of saying "Hello," and asking how it seemed to be back in Chicago. He suspected she would have liked some report from him upon the mission he was supposed to have undertaken for her; but she didn't ask for anything of the sort, nor too obviously wait for it: She finished their little talk by telling him she meant to fulfill to-morrow a promise she had made Margaret to look over his flat and see what condition it was in, after having stood housekeeperless so long. If she came around to-morrow, some time after lunch, would anybody be there to let her in?

Henry promised that in case the maid was out, as she would be likely to be on Saturday afternoon, he would see that a key was left with the people in the apartment below. It struck him as a little unlike his sister to have asked Violet to go poking about the flat in search of domestic horrors incident to a long period of bachelor occupancy, but he gave it no more than a passing thought. He had more important matters on his mind.

The annual meeting was to be to-morrow afternoon, and Henry was approaching this with all the sensations of a schoolboy going into a hard examination. Where would he be, he wondered—what sort of world would he find confronting him to-morrow night? If Joe had any mine of his own to spring, he had certainly given Henry no intimation of it.

5

The meeting went off with an appearance of unanimity and good will which Henry found almost farcical in the light of the bitter antagonisms he knew were bristling about the board. Prosperity of course is a wonderful unguent, and Joe's report was so eloquent of the prospect of it that the development of any friction upon the surface of things would have been impossible. Nothing short of a volcanic eruption could have broken through—and this didn't happen.

Joe was able to report the organization of forty-two subsidiary companies, since their original four mills had got into productive operation. The normal capacity of each of these subsidiary units was four thousand tons of straw, which meant that nearly ten per cent. of the entire straw crop of the flax-growing country would be processed next year under their patents.

The standard organization of these subsidiaries was based upon a local cash subscription of fifty thousand dollars, twenty thousand of which was to be paid to the parent company for a complete equipment of machinery. Since Corbett & Company was selling this machinery to the Greer Company for fifteen thousand dollars a set, the Greer Company showed a profit here of over two hundred thousand dollars.

Each of the subsidiary companies paid for its license under the patent by the issuance to the Greer Company of fifty thousand dollars of seven per cent. preferred stock, this being one-half of its preferred capitalization. The common stock in the subsidiaries was all held by the local subscribers to the remainder of the preferred, it being issued to them share for share. The Greer Company would thus receive in lieu of royalty from each of its subsidiaries, thirty-five hundred dollars a year in dividends on its preferred stock, which figured a total revenue to the parent company of one hundred forty-seven thousand dollars annually.

The bulk of the profits to be expected, however, would

derive from the contract into which the Greer Company had entered with the subsidiaries. The Greer Company agreed to buy the entire output of all the subsidiary companies at a price figured upon the sum of an average cost of the straw plus the cost of processing as shown by the four mills in operation, and a twenty per cent. manufacturer's profit. The Greer Company agreed further to pay half of its profits in merchandising this material, pro-rated according to tonnage, to the subsidiary companies. It wasn't possible, of course, to compute this profit in advance, but with market conditions as they were to-day, it would be very large, indeed.

It had required, Joe concluded, no skill or effort at persuasion to induce these groups of local capitalists to organize. Enthusiasm there was at a high pitch, and he believed it to be fully warranted. It was his confident expectation that the subsidiaries, out of their share of the profits on one year's crop, would get back the full amount of their investment. Most of them, he thought, would have sufficient working capital left, after building their warehouses and paying for the machinery, to finance themselves comfortably; but in any case, an ample line of credit would be available in the local banks. The important thing in the immediate future was to make sure that the plants were properly built, their equipments correctly installed, and the whole job completed in time to be ready for this summer's harvest. With this in mind, he expected to spend most of his time during this spring and summer in the Northwest, supervising the work and speeding it up.

"If we can get those mills equipped, I believe we'll have the job done. We know the process by experience now, as well as in theory. We know the stuff is good. We know the linen industry has been starving for years for raw material, and we believe we are going to have thirty-two million pounds of it to offer before a year from now. That's how we stand, and I think we're to be congratulated."

Joe possessed somehow the latchkey to Henry's imagination. Whenever he talked consecutively about anything, he transported Henry to the actual ground, made him see the thing Joe was talking about—and feel, too, with a sharper, clearer ring of emotion. There was conveyed to him now an exciting sense of the momentum of this thing Joe had been doing. A year ago when they had been talking possibilities and percentages, millions of dollars and thousands of tons, it had seemed too unreal for Henry's imagination to kindle at it; and their actual beginnings had seemed trivial—ludicrous compared to the vein they had been talking in. Personally, Joe had fascinated him, but the present occupation of his days had never seemed to Henry quite worthy of him.

The presentation now of that multitude of activities articulated into a single accomplishment had an effect upon Henry that fell not far short of awe. It was like seeing a great sail hoisted and burgeoning to the wind. He had been shocked a day or two ago when John had told him of the trick Joe had resorted to for getting control of the company, as well as hurt on his own account that his friend should have deceived him. Now the matter seemed negligible. Joe was entitled to the control of the company. His creative energy was the only vital principle in it. It was ludicrous, really, that the unimaginative intelligence of the financiers should have attempted to bar his path to it. Attempting to overreach him, they had found themselves overreached. Gently, humorously rather, he had outwitted them all. Henry could remember now with a smile, his own distress over having to vote against Joe in that memorable matter of the stock payment for the patents.

What if, he wondered fantastically, the others around the table were suddenly to see the thing in the same light? What if John were to say, "Look here, Joe, we know you've got control of the company, but that's all right. We ought to have given it to you from the first. We are satisfied to let you run the thing. All we want is the

fun of watching you do it." How natural an outbreak like that would be—and how monstrously impossible it was!

There was no more expression in any of their faces than if they had been playing bridge; but underneath their smooth urbane surface, Henry was aware of an uneasy alertness. What was he trying to do, here, and what did he mean by this? And for a climax, would he after all break his word, and elect his own board of directors at the end of the meeting? He didn't, of course—Henry could have told them hours ago that he would not.

The formal routine of winding up the business of the meeting was clicked off under Jennie's practised hand as rapidly as possible. As soon as the adjournment was taken, John with Gregory and Frank Crawford went away. There was no disposition on their part to linger for an informal discussion of affairs, or for the bottle of ancient Scotch which Joe offered to produce. They would be having a confab of their own, Henry supposed, and was glad they hadn't invited him to take part in it. There was momentarily a thoughtful look in Joe's eye as he watched their broad top-coated backs receding down the corridor.

He produced his bottle. Jennie, though invited, declined to join them over it. She wanted to get her minutes in shape, she said. Henry exclaimed in frank astonishment at the enormous size of the drink Joe poured for himself—an ordinary tumbler it was, and he had filled it more than two-thirds full. And he surprised Henry again by betraying a flash of embarrassment over Henry's calling attention to it. He drank down the whisky, though, like so much water. He was not in a talkative mood, Henry observed. Not melancholy either, but a little pre-occupied. He got up as soon as Henry had done sipping his drink, saying, "If you're going home, I'll drive you up."

6

Henry hadn't meant particularly to go home just then. It was only about four o'clock in the afternoon, and momentarily he hesitated. Before he could speak, Joe added, "I'll tell you what. We'll take the bottle along with us up to your place, and sit down with it as long as you like. I want to get out of here, that's all."

Henry was tickled by this humorous attribution to him of a reluctance to desert a bottle of Scotch, and pleased besides with Joe's offer to pay him a visit, so he was puzzled by a moment of reluctance which he unmistakably felt. Something or other, his conscience it seemed to be, was trying to tell him he ought not take Joe home with him to-day. They were half-way there in Joe's car and he was in the act of saying apologetically that the place looked like the devil with Margaret so long away, when the train of association completed itself. Violet! She had spoken of coming to his flat this afternoon.

He spent a desperate minute or two in the vain search for a pretext for taking Joe somewhere else. He contemplated telling him in so many words that Violet might be there and that he'd better not come in, but this didn't seem a possible thing to do, if for no other reason than that it involved an admission that he knew more of the affair than he was supposed to know. Anyhow, Violet had spoken of running in for a few minutes after lunch, and it was now well after four. Assuming that she'd carried out her intention at all, which was not any too likely, she'd almost certainly have gone by now. He'd have to chance it.

Oddly enough, after the first horrified moment when he saw the two coming face to face, he was enormously relieved that it had happened. Joe happened to be standing where Violet couldn't see him as she came down the corridor to the sitting-room, and she called gaily to Henry that she had him in her power now. She could blackmail him with Margaret to any tune she liked, after this look about the flat.

She flushed like a schoolgirl at the sight of Joe, threw him a rather cavalier nod of greeting, and then, seeming to change her mind about it, went deliberately up to him and held out her hand.

"I wonder if you ever got a message from me," she said composedly enough but without trying to make the words sound completely casual. "I left one with your butler, one day last winter when you were hurt. I hope you're quite all right again. I've known, the last two or three months, how miserable it is to be ill."

Joe remarked, without answering her question, that he'd heard she hadn't been well but that, apparently, her trip had done her good.

"I don't know whether it was going away or coming back that did it," she said, so lightly and swiftly that Henry was not quite sure whether he'd heard her aright or not. She went straight on, with a good deal more emphasis, to mention tea. She thought she could manage to produce some if they'd like it.

"I'll make tea in a minute, if you would like some," Henry said. "Joe insists that it's too stimulating for him, and won't drink it—but he brought along a bottle of Scotch."

This drew, amazingly, a black look from Joe. It was gone in an instant, and he said with a laugh that that bottle of Scotch had been brought along for Henry, and no one else. For himself, he would like a cup of tea as well as anything he could think of.

Another odd thing happened then. Violet offered to go and make it, naturally enough, since she had been the one who had suggested having it; and Henry, equally of course, insisted on doing it himself. This was his house, and tea-making was his specialty. Even Margaret had been known to admit that he understood it better than she did. He was in the midst of this and on his way to the door when the sudden misgiving assailed him that Violet might not want to be left alone with Joe, and that her insistence on making the tea had been sincere. He stopped,

tried, without succeeding, to pick up Violet's eye, took another hesitating step toward the door, and finally wavered into saying, "Of course if you would rather make it, Violet . . ."

She whipped around, and in so doing turned her back squarely on Joe, her face ablaze with an uncontrollable exasperation. Her voice had a perceptible edge on it, too, though luckily it was not as expressive as her face, as she said, "I've no *passion* for making tea, Henry, nor even for drinking it if it's any bother."

Henry said it wasn't, of course, and slunk away precipitately to the kitchen. He couldn't wonder that his clumsiness had annoyed her. Floundering about like that, he had heavily underscored whatever difficulty there might have been in the situation for either. But a mere passing flash of irritation would not have produced as deep a detonation as that. He had been the target for them often enough to know. This was like the snapping of a wire that had been drawing tighter and tighter for a long time. It was as if she had endured his presence there in the room to the last possible moment, and had then been confronted by the possibility that he would not leave it at all.

Oh, he was exaggerating, of course, the way he always did—making mountains out of molehills. Naturally, she had been anxious to get rid of him. Here was an unforeseen chance to clear up a misconception which had been distressing her for months; and she had seen herself in danger of being balked of it by her cousin's sheer inexcusable stupidity. He felt horribly foolish out there, somehow, puttering around in the kitchen, not knowing whether to hurry or to delay his tea-making operation. He did both by turns.

But the really appalling idea that this might be, on the part of both Joe and Violet, a deliberate rendezvous, did not break over him until he was just on the point of bearing down upon them again with his tray. He set the tray down again upon the kitchen table—he was lucky not to have dropped it—and sat down himself on a kitchen chair.

It was a crazy notion, of course, utterly unwarranted, outrageous—and yet there was a fatal sort of plausibility about it. Violet's telephoning and arranging to get the key, and Joe's impatience the moment the meeting was over to come home with him. Violet had always been a flirt, but she had never, he thought, done anything that went as far as this. He wished, forlornly, that he never thought of things like that; and he went on from there to wish with passionate intensity that when he did think of them, he could make up his mind what to do about it.

He experienced a temporary relief in finding the pair composedly talking commonplaces, when he came in with the tray, and for the twenty minutes or so before Violet went away, the conversation ran easily enough upon no more serious topic than his own sudden emergence upon Violet's horizon, after all these years, as a brilliantly successful bridge player and gambler upon steamer pools.

She took her leave of Joe informally, without another handshake, upon the vaguely expressed hope that he would come to see them some time. "Though if you're going to be up north all summer, I don't suppose you will."

To Henry, she said when he had followed her into the vestibule, "I haven't made up my mind yet what sort of blackmail I'm going to levy on you for not telling Margaret what this place looks like—but when I decide what I want, I'll let you know."

Could she possibly mean, Henry wondered; that she didn't want Margaret told about this meeting with Joe? And hadn't the indifference of her parting with Joe been really a little overdone? Henry had something new to worry about. There wasn't any doubt of that.

7

For Joe, that handful of minutes with Violet, while Henry was out in the kitchen making tea, contained one of the most astonishing and revolutionary experiences of his life.

He had gone to the rendezvous not all all sure whom he

would find there, nor what the purpose of it was. Clear curiosity was all that had led him to keep it. A note in a plain sealed envelope had been handed him by Anson the night before, delivered, the man said by an A. D. T. messenger. "If you care to go home with Henry Craven after the meeting to-morrow . . ." That was all it said, and there was no signature. He wasn't familiar with Violet's handwriting, and he did not at once think of her as a possible author of it.

He was at first disposed to regard Henry as the person primarily concerned. His manner had struck Joe as not quite natural since his return; and Jennie, to whom he'd mentioned this, confirmed his impression even more emphatically. "He's not a bit like himself, with me," she said. Had *he* got himself into a scrape of some sort, Joe wondered. You never could tell. But the reference to the meeting limited the zone of conjecture very materially. Barring Jennie and the girls in the office, there weren't many women who knew they were to hold a meeting to-morrow afternoon.

Once he'd thought of Violet—a wild enough cast of the imagination, certainly—the phraseology of the note pointed to her almost conclusively. He could not even conjecture, though, what could have driven her to an act like this, Panic, one would suppose, but what could she think she had to be afraid of after this lapse of months? And he'd done nothing to cause a sudden recrudescence of her hatred of him. Of course, he'd go and see. He went braced, he supposed, for anything.

His first look at her mystified him, the sudden bright flush and the emotion which spoke from her wide open eyes; partly fright, it was, but not all. And of the anger he'd expected, not a trace!

What she said was surprising enough; not that she'd sent him a message when he was hurt, but that she'd left it, which meant, if words meant anything, that she had come in person to see him. The fact was new to him now, but this did not impeach the truth of it. He had told

Anson on one of those black days, that he didn't want to be told the names of his visitors. He recognized that it was an amazing thing for her to have done, but the astonishment he felt now was not over the visit nor even over her admitting that she had paid it, but over the manner in which the admission was made. It was a formal treaty of peace, an announcement of her new line, presented with reference to their public, Henry.

But that something very different underlay this public manner, Joe saw—and believed she meant him to see. Why the devil couldn't Henry see it and take himself off? (He had got Joe on a raw nerve with that remark, his second that day, about the bottle of Scotch. Joe was developing an angry distaste these days for jocular references to his fondness for whisky or the amount of it he consumed. He was beginning to do his serious drinking in solitude.) He held his breath over the way she flared up and swept her cousin out of the room, and he did not move, nor did she, until they heard the flop of the swing door into the kitchen.

Then she turned and faced him, and he moved a step toward her—and stopped. Something the same look was in her face that he had seen just after he had kissed her, the look that had made him think of Beatrice; not a woman's look at all—a child's. It was troubled now, and desperately resolute. Her pose was not a woman's, either; it was—a schoolgirl's. He saw her lips were trembling and felt a lump come into his throat.

"I must say it quickly," she began, and then for a matter of seconds stood silent. "It was true, what you said in the car that day. It was all true. That's why it made me so angry. I didn't know it till you said it. That's—that's one of the things I had to tell you. I didn't think I'd ever do it but I haven't been sleeping very well. And none of the things I tried, to get it out of my head, were any good . . . So I thought if I told you . . . You see why, don't you? I mean, you understand it isn't . . ."

"Yes, I understand," he told her hastily. This was quite untrue. In the revulsion of feeling that had swept over him, he was bewildered. The thing to do, he admonished himself, was to remember every word she said so that he could think out her incredible meaning afterward. They wouldn't have much more time, now. Henry might be coming back any minute. "I wish you'd sit down," he said, and after she had obeyed him, in a sort of entranced docility, he added, "If there's anything you want me to do . . ."

"There isn't," she interrupted with a gasp; "not a thing. It's just . . ." She broke off there and clasped her hands tight in her lap, between her knees. "There's something else I want you to know. I've never told John what really happened that day. But I didn't tell him—what you must have thought I did. I said it wasn't anything. I gave him my word it wasn't. I just wanted him to let me alone and not ask questions. But of course he thought . . ."

"Yes, of course," Joe assented at random. "That's all right."

"He was horribly angry," she persisted. "I don't know whether he is yet, or not. He doesn't act that way any more, but perhaps that's just because he doesn't want me to—worry about it."

"Well, that's all right." A gleam of a smile broke through on the words. "You don't need to worry about me, anyhow. I'll look out for myself. I have been, all along for that matter."

She nodded. "I couldn't bear to have you think, if anything did happen, that I was the one who—started it. I knew what you'd think of me. When you'd really been the one who—saved me. I didn't suppose men did chivalrous things like that. That's what it was. Because it wouldn't have—meant anything—much, to you."

"It's all right," he repeated. The poor phrase seemed to be all he could lay his tongue to. After a moment's struggle, not with embarrassment but with the mere stiff-

ness of his mind, he added, "There's nothing more for you to worry about. You can forget all about it."

She smiled in rueful dissent to that, and he met it with a smile of his own. At last he had something to say. "That was a surprising word you used—chivalry. I don't believe it was ever hooked on to me before. I've never been what you could call a Galahad . . ."

"I know," she broke in. There was a spark of animation in her tone, now. She was no longer frozen. "I heard all about that before I ever knew you. I always thought you must be one of the—horridest people, that way, I had ever known. I suppose that's why—partly why—it got me when you acted the way you did in the car."

"I can't see," Joe said, "that there was anything much to that. It was a string we couldn't play out and I said so. Maybe if I hadn't had a good deal of—experience, I wouldn't have seen that we couldn't play it out."

When she spoke again, at the end of a short silence, her manner had stiffened, so that once more it was as if she were trying to recite something. "I suppose I must have been one of the most ignorant people in the world. I didn't think I could tell you this. I don't believe it's a thing you'll be able to believe. But it's true, and it's the only real excuse I have. I thought I knew a lot, as much as most people, but I didn't. I knew—nothing at all. It was all new—that day. As if I'd never been married—or anything. You can't believe that,—can you?"

"I knew it then," he said, not looking at her as he spoke. "That was what pulled me up, gave me time to think." He added a moment later, "It wasn't what we wanted,—either of us."

He had a strange sensation that this last remark of his went falling, falling, for a long time, like a dislodged rock, down a bottomless canyon, bounding from wall to wall, sending up fainter and more distant echoes, until at last an abysmal silence swallowed it.

After a while she said, "You wanted to be friends with

me then. I suppose it's too late for that to be any good to you, now." There was no color of sentimental penitence in her tone, but she seemed to feel the need of clearing her meaning of this possible interpretation, and added, "I mean, now that your daughter has married and gone away."

"It's too late in a way," he said thoughtfully, ignoring her reference to Beatrice. "I had a fool idea for a while last summer, of settling down, maybe buying a place up at Lake Forest, turning into one of the stall-fed crowd myself, when some of the pile we're going to make out of this linen process came in. I've got over that."

"I'm glad you have. You aren't like us.—Of course," she added, "we aren't all like ourselves. Not all the time. But you still want to be rich? What will you do with it, if you don't settle down?"

"No trouble about that!" he told her, with a laugh. "The more I have, the bigger a life I can swing. But I've got to hatch some chickens before I can begin counting 'em. They're already counted, for that matter. Forty-two little flax mills, spotted all over the Northwest. I've got to see to it that they're all built and equipped right and ready for business between now and August. Good fun, that'll be—getting out of a white-collar job for a while."

It was then that Henry Craven came in with the tea.

8

As the weeks went by, this experience of Joe Greer's loomed higher and more mysterious, like a receding mountain. He found no difficulty in remembering every word Violet had said to him that day. There was hardly a sentence of it that he did not pick up again and again to scrutinize and reinterpret and ponder over. It became a sort of Bible for him, that little interview.

Prima facie, it was plain enough. She was in love with him. It had been no passion for cold justice that had driven her to the admission of the truth of what he had

said to her in the car the day of the cloud-burst—and she didn't for a moment pretend that it was.

Neither had she tried to lead him to believe that the "new" thing she had surrendered to that day had been a mere passing gust of desire. He remembered how that sentence of his, "It wasn't what we wanted, either of us," had gone plunging and echoing down into an abyss of silence. She had not by a word, not even by an acquiescent movement of the head, availed herself of the shelter he had held out to her. It *was* what she wanted, he was at liberty to think—as much to-day as it had been last summer.

Her anger had been merely the first instinctive weapon of unrequited love. When it had failed to bring him to her, she had come to him. There was nothing in that to have mystified a man of Joe's compendious experience.

There is, though, a fundamental distinction to be made between Joe and the type of man with whom he is easily confounded. The clue lies in a thing he once said to Jennie MacArthur—and, indeed, repeated in substance to his daughter Beatrice. He had said to Jennie, in speaking of Annabel as an exception to this rule, "I had never had anything to do with a woman before—and I never have since for that matter—who wasn't in love with me—crazy about me, for the time being anyhow." And to Trix, "The only woman who ever kissed me without wanting to was your mother."

It is probable that both these statements of Joe's were literally true. He was sensitive, and he was not vain. And thanks to these two qualities, though many of his love-affairs had been temporary and tawdry enough they had always been to some extent redeemed by a genuine mutuality. His insistence upon this had not been a moral attitude, but an instinctive necessity—and it had saved him from the emotional bankruptcy which is the fate of the average libertine. He never could greet the passion of any woman, even the corset model or the chorus-girl, with the fatuous dead grin of the gratified conqueror.

Whatever sort of woman Violet might have been, her revelation of herself to Joe could not have been wholly a betrayal.

She was, however, in his experience, a woman of an altogether exceptional sort. Her breeding, her fineness of texture, the hard jeweled quality of her, had instantly attracted him. He had, unwarrantably to be sure, taken for granted that she possessed a certain tough honesty of mind which he did not often attribute to women, and had never before attributed to a woman who was sexually attractive to him. It was here that his disillusionment upon the day of their quarrel had been sharpest. She had refused to face the facts of their situation. "Aren't you any realer than that?" he had exclaimed, outraged by her unexpected cowardice.

Well, she had made amends for that panic-stricken defeat on the day of their rendezvous at Henry Craven's—ample, astonishing amends. She had stood before him, trembling to the lips, to acknowledge the true nature of the gift she had offered him, and he had refused. She attributed his refusal to chivalry, and wished him to know that she had not, voluntarily at least, betrayed him to her husband. Here was a courage in fact-facing that took Joe's breath. It thrilled him every time he thought about it.

He spent hours thinking about her, and his memories and reflections vested her with the attributes of romance. One thing she had told him went to his head like wine. She had been sitting with her clasped hands pressed between her knees, and her voice had been dry with the desperate effort she was making to tell him all the truth. "It's the only excuse I have," she said. "I thought I knew a lot, but really I didn't know anything. It was all new, that day."

This was the amazing paradox. She was a woman of the world, beautiful, clever, experienced, sophisticated—and it had remained for him, for Joe Greer, to awaken her. She didn't suppose, she'd said, that he would be

able to believe that. But he had never doubted it. The truth declared itself in the very pose of her body, the schoolgirl pose in which she had desperately faced him, that had brought a lump into his throat.

His own emotions struck him as queer. She had never looked more desirable than when she had thus stood before him making her unreserved confession, yet he had not felt even the beginning of an impulse to make love to her. During their whole interview, he hadn't touched her, not even during the silence after he had said fatuously that "that" wasn't what either of them wanted, a silence which amounted, on her part, to a denial that it was true.

Even now, when he realized that on his part it hadn't been true, either, he couldn't imagine himself pulling her up in the sudden embrace which her candor would have warranted. On instinct he'd played his part better. She had come to him to make her confession, still trusting to the "chivalry" that she had attributed to him on the earlier occasion. And she had been safe in trusting him. The quality she had discovered in him was there!

She meant, he thought, to go on trusting to it. She hadn't invited him, even in the most impalpable way, to ask for—opportunities. Apparently it contented her that he should know the truth. Her honesty had, he perceived, lifted the affair to a higher level altogether. He couldn't even contemplate furtive meetings with her, illicit gratifications. She had become for him a finer person than that. He felt a profound pity for her. What a life she had led, with that flaming spirit of hers, among the stall-fed cattle! "We aren't like ourselves," she had said; "not all of us; not all the time." And John Williamson, married to her for twenty years, father of a child by her, had never been able to teach her what love was!

There dawned upon Joe a romantic dream. He'd had many a romantic dream before, but never with a single exception about a woman—and that exception had been his daughter. His new dream was about Violet. Some

day, when the harvest of his great idea about flax straw had been stowed away and a new field awaited him, Violet would come to him, to be taught what love was. And marriage. True marriage—not the unreal imposture she'd taken on trust and lived half smothered in since girlhood. It would be as new for him as for her. As unlike the sensual substitutes he had contented himself with as it would be unlike the pitiful farce of his legal marriage with Annabel.

(That, thank heaven, was ended at last. He had received a copy of the final California decree while Henry was in France with his sister and Violet.)

What a mess of cross-purposes life was! An ox like John Williamson would have been just the man for Annabel. And she would never have given him a moment's disquiet. Violet must have given him a good many. And some day . . . Poor Williamson! He'd take it hard, of course, a blow like that to his pride. But in the meantime he might rest in peace. Violet wouldn't be flirting with an operatic barytone this summer. The man she loved would be up in the North, getting ready for the flax—which was going to increase John's fortune as well as make his own. He didn't begrudge that to Williamson. He'd take no advantage of him, either with Violet or in the business.

He saw her again before he went north. The meeting came about in a way that was commonplace enough, and in its commonplaceness rather surprising to Joe. She asked him to dinner. The invitation was telephoned by her secretary. "Could Mr. Greer dine with Mr. and Mrs. Williamson Thursday evening at eight?" Joe said he could, and went—not knowing what of a wide range of possibilities to expect. It was not a strictly society dinner—these usually ran to bridge afterward—but a more heterogeneous affair, with a marked leaning toward the musical wing of Bohemia. The Hugh Corbetts were old guard, of course, but they rather conspicuously misrepresented their type; and the other guests were the com-

poser, Anthony March, and his wife, who had been Mary Wollaston, the Novellis and Mrs. Novelli's sister, Rose Aldrich, who was available as an odd woman for Joe, since her husband was in Washington arguing a case before the supreme court.

If Violet had tried to illustrate the truth of her assertion to Joe that the stall-fed were not like themselves all the time, she could not have done it better. It was a good party, and but for his preoccupation with Violet, Joe might have enjoyed it hugely. Two of the other four men had minds as vivacious and trenchant as his own. And of the five women, four were real personalities, and four again were notably beautiful. But Violet held him all the evening in a state of wonder.

Most of the time her manner was simply unreconcilable with the woman who had come to Henry Craven's apartment to see him. She treated him comfortably—like an old friend; called him, openly, "Joe," even in her husband's presence. How she could have explained this volte-face to John, he could not imagine, but she must have done it somehow, for there wasn't a trace of self-consciousness about either of them. They certainly knew how to keep their faces, that bunch.

She didn't seat him by her at dinner, and later in the evening when the men came in from the dining-room, he found her intrenched in conversation with Rose, with whom he had pretty well talked himself out, upon the subject of the stage, at dinner. So after drifting over in her direction without dislodging Rose, he drifted rather sulkily away again, and sat down by himself. However, when Novelli, by vociferous request, went to the piano and began to play, Violet came quietly and sat down beside him.

She did not talk to him, even then. Apparently there were enough real musicians in the party to shame the others into silence. The Brahms Rhapsody, which Novelli was playing with an erotic Italian fire that it would have amazed the old Hamburger to discover he had put into it,

might have stirred Joe profoundly had he been able to feel that Violet, too, was responding to it. But he knew, somehow, she wasn't. She was simply waiting quietly for the music to end; and the knowledge irritated him, not with Violet, but with the music. It did end at last—and then there came a change.

Headed by Novelli and seconded by Hugh Corbett, they gathered round March, demanding that he perform "something of his own." He protested with apparent seriousness that they ought to ask him to sing instead, as he did that much better than he played the piano, his wife listening to this absurdity in contented amusement.

Under cover of the diversion, Violet, without turning to look at Joe, nor relinquishing the smile that was bent upon the other group, asked, "Are you going Sunday?" The low tone was charged with emotion that made him catch his breath, and before he could answer, she added, "For all summer!"

"I'll come down once or twice, I guess," he said.

A sudden sense of the portentous thing there was between them broke over him in a great surge and all but stifled him. Evidently it was stifling her, too. She managed a banality or two about what the weather would be like up there. She'd never been in that country. John went somewhere into those parts for ducks, but not of course at this time of year. Would there be anything for him to do in the way of amusements, golf or riding?

His answers were mere monosyllables. Presently she said, peremptorily and very low, "You'll have to stop looking at me like that. I can't stand it."

He knew he'd been devouring her, and he told her humbly he was sorry. "I'm trying to play the game," he added, "but I'm not very good at it."

Either his apology or her own outburst relieved her, for she turned to him, as he turned away from her, and the tension sensibly slackened. "I'm glad you aren't," she said swiftly—and after a brief pause went on. "I can see you up there, when you've got out of a white collar.

It'll be a blue flannel shirt, I suppose, very much unbuttoned, and khaki riding breeches, and you'll be swearing horribly at a lot of laborers because they aren't building things fast enough to suit you."

He laughed at this motion-picture misconception of his summer's activities. The sort of people he'd be having confabs with, he told her, would be the leading local hardware merchants in this town or that, the banker, a retired farmer or two, contractors and builders. There wouldn't be any sitting around on horseback. They'd meet in hotel parlors and real-estate offices, and he wouldn't dare swear whole-heartedly at all for fear they'd be shocked. The worst of it would be the evenings, after ten o'clock when everybody but himself had gone to bed.

"Will you write me a letter now and then, on some of those evenings?" she asked. "I don't mean . . . I mean just an ordinary letter, that will tell me where you are and what you've been doing that day, and what the hotel's like! So I can see you there—that's all I mean."

She left him without having given him time to answer, alert, apparently, to respond to some call which had been imperceptible to him, and did not speak to him again that evening, except for the "Good-by! Good luck!" which she nodded brightly at him when he, along with the other guests, was going. He had thought for a moment that she didn't mean even to shake hands with him, but some one who had been standing in the way drew aside and with a little laugh, like the acknowledgment of an after-thought, she did.

God, what an actress she was! She was the same woman who had stood before him saying, desperately, "It was all true," and, "It was new that day."

He did not write to her from the North. His thoughts of her when at the end of a day's toil he was left alone at last in an hotel bedroom were not such as he could entrust to paper. They were made poignant, too, and sometimes half frantic by doubt of her. Which of the

two women he knew her for would she be as she tore open the flap of a cheap envelope from some small Montana hotel? It wasn't worth risking. Silence would be better.

He came home for a few days early in July—a minor failure in the arrival of the machinery was his excuse—on a Saturday morning during the first onslaught of a period of ferociously hot weather, and after having debated with himself at length on the train whether to let her know he was in town or to trust to the information reaching her through her husband or Henry, he telephoned to her Lake Forest house from the station the moment he left the train.

She asked him out directly for over the week-end, and laughed at his hesitation about accepting. "It's John you've come to see, isn't it—and Greg? Well, they'll be here." Then she asked him whether he had ever played bridge with either of them. He told her he had not, whereupon she warned him that he didn't play at all, ever. With a laugh, as he caught on, he assented. "I never touch a card of any sort," he assured her. "I've sworn off."

Thanks to this maneuver, they managed to be together a good deal during the next two days, for play during that house party was almost incessant, and Violet was able to pose as the conscientious hostess looking after the odd guest who did not join in. Her place at the tables was taken by Dorothy, who played with all the obsessed seriousness of the neophyte.

It was not, however, a satisfactory visit for Joe. Violet's tactics worried him. They were no longer audacious. She never openly carried him off as she had done at the traps that Sunday morning, the first time she had ever seen him. She never sought, nor for long allowed, any secure solitude for them. Yet in the fringes of the crowd or at table with no more privacy than derived from the fact that both their neighbors were turned away from them, she would talk to him in a way that brought his heart into his throat. He had always supposed he had

a talent for keeping his face, but these talks with her kept him in perpetual terror of a betrayal.

He hated, too, being under John Williamson's roof. The husband's incredible complacency irritated him. He seemed impervious to the warnings of jealousy. It wasn't possible to assume that he had ceased to care for her. His steady-going, considerate affection for her was obvious. What sort of terms were they on, anyhow? How had she explained, and he accepted, her change of attitude toward himself?

Violet was not informative on these points, even when he resorted at last to direct questions. She earnestly protested herself fond of John immensely. He was an absolute dear in a lot of ways. In some ways that Joe wouldn't understand, nor believe. "You would never understand him," she asserted, "any more than he would you."

"Well, I wish he weren't so damned unsuspicious," Joe said. "He'd make this a lot easier for me if he tried to make it harder."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "You know," she said, "in a business way, it's you I worry about; not him."

"Well, you needn't," he told her shortly. "He might have got me if I hadn't played a hunch earlier in the game. But I did. I've got my share in the Greer Company nailed down, where he can never get it away from me."

"In the long run," she persisted, "he'll get the better of you. I believe he's already sure of it. That's just a—hunch, as you say. He doesn't talk to me about it any more."

He took this soberly, apparently to her surprise. Evidently she had expected him to laugh at her; and when he didn't, she told him contritely that she hadn't more than half meant it.

He made no reply to that, and after watching her intently for a moment, she asked in sudden concern, "Joe,

has anything begun to go wrong, now?—Anything you can see, here or up north?"

"No, I guess not," he said absently. "Why?"

"You seem different, somehow," she said. "Oh, I know it's hot, and you've been working horribly hard, but you always seemed like a person who couldn't be tired. And now . . . You don't look quite natural either."

"I'm not sleeping much," he confessed. "Haven't since I got that crack on the head last winter."

(Indeed, the amount of whisky it now took to insure him even the beginning of a night's sleep was so great as to have begun whispering an impatiently unheeded warning.)

"Of course," he added, on a new note, "this thing of ours doesn't make it any easier."

They were really alone for once. It was Sunday night. A big purple storm-cloud, driving up from the southwest had, with a flash or two of lightning and a sudden patter of rain-drops, driven the rest within doors. He and Violet had lingered outside to show the good faith of their combined prediction that the thing would blow around, as it now showed signs of meaning to do.

"I'm not trying to make you sorry for me," he went on, "but it is wearing you down, too. I guess it's harder for you than for me.—Violet," his voice dealt with the word roughly, "what do you do? How do you manage?"

"My life, you mean?" she asked. "I play bridge . . .!"

"I mean about your husband," he interrupted.

"We're perfectly good friends," she told him, after a silence, "but that's all. There's nothing new about that. It's been that way, practically, for a long time."

"You said that day at Henry's that it wouldn't have meant much to me—what I hadn't done the other time. It would have, but I didn't know it—then. This is as new a thing to me as it is to you. It's changed everything. That means it's got to come out somewhere. You've trusted me, and you can go on trusting me, but we can't stop here—and we aren't going into the ditch."

"I don't know where we are going," she said hopelessly.
"There's no place we can go."

The words ended in a sob, and in an instant she was in his arms. He kissed her, too—not as he had done on the earlier occasion, but gently, reverently almost.

"I'll wait," he said. "I think you're the gamest thing in the world; and when the time comes, and you're ready, you'll do the thing that's there in front of you to do. I'll wait till then."

She rose then, and they walked slowly toward the house. But before they got within the luminous zone from the lighted windows, she stopped, and kissed him fugitively once more. She uttered a little laugh as they moved on again.

"We're acting like a pair of children," she said.

It is true one would hardly have expected just this white flame of romance from these ingredients.

Joe went back to Chicago early the next morning, and left for the North before the end of the week. He didn't see Violet again until October.

9

Henry Craven went up to the Williamsons' for the week-end over the first of August. His sister was already there. She was practically spending the summer with Violet. Henry came looking forward to a good time. His troubles were in abeyance. The Greer Company was thriving like the scriptural bay tree. Thanks to its profits on the sale of machinery, its bank balance was imposing. Since the meeting in April there had not been a breath of trouble between John and Joe. Apparently John was reconciled to Joe's voting control of the company as long as Joe didn't attempt to exercise it unfairly; and Henry could see no reason why Joe, with his program adopted and his hands left free, should attempt to exercise it unfairly.

Violet's emotional stresses seemed to have subsided, too, since she had had that talk with Joe. It had ceased to seem important to Henry whether the meeting between them had been accidental or contrived.

Even Henry's modest personal affairs were prospering. The directors had raised his salary at the April meeting to twelve thousand a year. Margaret had made enough in commissions upon her highly successful purchases for Portia Novelli in Italy, that spring, to pay her own expenses, which she was very proudly and delightedly doing. Henry sometimes wondered whether his luck had not really changed in some mysterious and revolutionary way that day at Monte Carlo.

He bolted the office early, got out to Lake Forest in time for lunch, had the good fortune to find young Dorothy at a loose end, and took her on for tennis. Dodo played a very stylish game, immensely superior in the matter of form to the late Victorian, back court, side arm affair that Henry stuck to. She was the prettiest thing in the courts that it was possible to imagine—with her smashing service that didn't often go in, and her lightning rushes on the net. But Henry had a mean chop stroke and a fairly accurate lob, and he beat her two sets in three—an achievement of which he was enormously proud, especially as Margaret had looked on admiringly during the last set. It looked an exceedingly jolly world to him about five o'clock that afternoon. He knew he would be horribly lame to-morrow, but that didn't matter.

He found the evening, though, rather dull. It seemed they had been having a terrific day on the board of trade. December wheat, in which trading had begun on July fifteenth at around two seventy-five, had dropped with a crash to two eleven a bushel, and this portent monopolized the conversation of the men for a solid hour after dinner. The consensus of the group around John's table was that the decline flew in the face of world-wide and invincible economic conditions. There was not enough wheat to feed the world. The war between Russia and Poland was raging furiously; Bolshevik hosts were advancing upon Warsaw; England could not allow the Poles to be overwhelmed;—Lloyd George had as good as said so. Those December contracts in wheat were likely to be settled at around three dollars.

Henry yawned, and fancied it was so. Three or four of these guests of John's were men whose opinions were regarded by readers of the financial pages of the papers as authoritative. But Henry cared nothing about wheat, and he cared less than nothing about politics, to which the conversation presently drifted. Harding or Cox—League or Association of Nations. It looked like Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee to Henry.

The boredom of this didn't avail, however, to overthrow his mood of contentment. He drifted out on the terrace when the sitting adjourned, and philosophically watched the young ones dancing to a phonograph. Dodo nodded him an invitation to cut in, but he smiled and shook his head, indicating by a gesture his feeling of advanced decrepitude since his bout with her on the courts that afternoon.

It was amazing how the kids were growing up! Young Ellen Whitney there—she couldn't be a day over fifteen, and was going to be a beauty like her mother—was carrying on with Carter Corbett with an audacity of technique which in Henry's day a girl would not have arrived at short of twenty-four. He wandered off with a vague idea of finding Violet. But when he happened upon her in a dark corner with Ellen Whitney's father, he strolled on without interrupting them. This flirtation was traditional. It had been going on quite harmlessly for a dozen years. It occurred to him rather crudely, as he walked away, that it was remarkable also how the old stayed young. There was nothing, though, he felt sure, to that affair of hers with Joe.

John caught him just as he was on the point of going to bed, and made a date with him for to-morrow morning in the gun-room. There was a little matter he would like to take up with Henry before he went back to town. Henry was feeling so cheerful that he didn't spend more than ten minutes before he went to sleep worrying over what it might be that John wanted to talk to him about.

It was, however, with an instantly awakened misgiving that he noted, when they sat down together in the gun-room after breakfast, John's reluctance, whatever it was he wanted to talk about, to come to the point of it. This was portentously unlike him, and the consequence was that the friendlier and more casual he seemed, the more alarming, to Henry, he became.

He asked how things were going at the office. Oh, he didn't mean business details, precisely—he knew all about that—but the general feel of it all. Did Greer's letters sound as enthusiastic as ever? He wasn't finding any trouble up there, was he? John knew what good terms Henry was on with Miss MacArthur. Nothing about her—well, her manner, to indicate anything in the background, he supposed? No, he wasn't inquiring about anything in particular. Just wanted Henry's general reaction on it. It *looked* good certainly. There was no one like Greer for speeding things up. Greg Corbett had always said that about him.

Then, for a while, John dropped the flax business altogether, and talked about Margaret; the surprising success she had made buying Italian furniture and so on for Mrs. Novelli. That was quite a business she had. Remarkable what a big thing she had made of it. And right now, in the impoverished state of Europe, and with exchange what it was, the opportunity was bigger than ever. Margaret really knew a lot about that sort of stuff, didn't she? Period furniture and glass! She'd sure enjoyed the plunge she'd had; excited as a kid about it. It might, John thought, prove a real field for her. She'd marry, some time, no doubt, but meanwhile she'd be happier with something to do than sitting around waiting for Henry to get rich out of the flax business.

"And by the way," John went on. He hesitated there for a moment and Henry's heart dropped a beat altogether. The lightning was going to strike now, he knew, but he hadn't the faintest premonition of the nature of the bolt. "By the way," John repeated, "I think you had better

endorse your shares in the Greer Company, and bring them around to me. Then if I decide to dispose of mine, I can sell yours too."

"Sell it?" Henry echoed, astounded.

"Oh, it's like every other business," John went on evenly. "Even this antique business of Mrs. Novelli's. It's a question of getting in and getting out at the right time—and usually the time for getting out is damned short. I'd hate to have to go ashore and leave you behind, so it strikes me I had better have the shares—just in case, you understand."

"I don't see . . ." Henry stammered. "Everything has been going better than we hoped, hasn't it? I never really believed it was going to win until this summer. Has anything happened—I suppose it must have—that I don't know anything about?"

"Not a thing," John, with a shade of impatience, assured him. "You know all about that trick Greer played to get control. Well, whenever I find myself in one of these industrials that I don't control, I always wear a life belt, that's all. And I think you had better put yours on, too. It's just as you like, of course."

"Of course I'll bring you the shares," Henry said. "They're really yours, anyhow. I've never paid for them." But he knew he wasn't disguising his profound unhappiness over John's suggestion.

"Look here, Henry," John said, after he had lighted a fresh cigar and offered Henry one; "this isn't anything to get worked up about. We don't contemplate doing anything for the present. It may be weeks or months even—or we may never sell it at all. But the farmers and the small fry are still feeling rich. Even that knockout in the wheat pit yesterday won't change that. And besides, wheat will come back, for a while, anyhow. Up north, they believe in this process of Greer's, just as much as we do; and there's a lot of capital up there that would pay a damn good price for stock in the Greer Company. As far as the control is concerned, twenty-five per cent.

of the stock is as good as forty-five. So we may decide, to some extent, to cash in.

"These boom times aren't going to last forever. One of the biggest motor-car companies in the country is in trouble right now. Greer isn't the sort of man we can trust the control to—control of anything—let alone in mixed-up times like these. He's one of these fellows that runs away with an idea; and if we see he's running away with this, we want to be fixed so we can hop off the wagon. That's all."

"I see," Henry said. He got up, literally a trifle giddy, and moved toward the door. "All right," he added, "I'll bring the shares in the morning."

"There's one important thing," John said, the words checking Henry's hand upon the latch. "This has got to be kept absolutely quiet. If Greer or Miss MacArthur should catch on to what's in the wind, there would be the devil to pay. Better not speak of it to anybody—not even to Margaret or Violet." Henry nodded, and went out.

On his way to bed that night Margaret fell in beside him and said she would come into his room for a few minutes for a talk. He meant to go into town on an early train next morning, and she didn't expect to come down to breakfast. She helped herself to one of his cigarettes, hung fire for a minute while she was getting herself started, and then, rather shyly—an unusual manner for Margaret—asked him whether John had been talking to him that day.

Henry admitted lamely that he and John had talked about various matters—business mostly.

"Well, did he talk about me? That's what I want to know."

"Oh, yes! Yes, he did. He said quite a lot about you." But he couldn't, as it happened, remember just then a word of what John had said about Margaret, and he stopped there, vaguely amiable, but quite blank.

Margaret looked at him curiously. "What's the mat-

ter with you, Henry? You've been looking queer all day. Are you trying to act like a—half-wit? What I want to know is whether John told you what he's going to do for me? He's going to buy in with Portia for me—buy me a partnership. Did he tell you that?"

"Oh, by jove, that's great!" Henry cried. He was sure this was the way he would feel about it when he got his ideas sufficiently straightened out to feel anything. "No, he didn't tell me. I can see now though that he was feeling around the edges of it to see how it would strike me." He went over to her and kissed her—probably to her surprise, he was aware. Caresses weren't common between them. "That's simply great, Peg," he repeated. "I wish you all the luck in the world. Sit down and tell me all about it." He was relieved to see that this burst of enthusiasm contented her, and that she was satisfied to attribute his momentary lapse to mere brotherly stupidity.

She did tell him all about it at length. How it was John's own idea. How he had gone to Portia one day last week, broached the matter himself, gone into details, seen her books—practically done the whole thing—before telling her a word about it. She had talked over the project with Portia herself, but only as a sort of day-dream. She had never thought of John as a possible means of realizing it. It would mean, she supposed, going to Europe again this fall, and leaving Henry perhaps for months. But this wouldn't matter. He had got on perfectly well without her, as far as she could see, during her previous absences. It was simply too wonderful to be true. She was going to succeed at it, she knew she was. Henry couldn't remember seeing her glow like this since she had been a girl, and wished himself rid for a few minutes of the weight that was pressing upon his diaphragm, so that he could share her enthusiasm properly. Of course if she thought he was, it was all right.

She said, "I don't believe you can realize what it'll mean, Henry, if I do succeed. Real independence of you, and everybody. You've been awfully good—and I've

been rotten to you about half the time. But you see that was because—well, because you *were* so good; because you had to be. You were doing your duty by me, just as you always did it by mother. And whenever I got to thinking about it, it drove me wild. And of course you were the only person I could take my wildness out on. But if it comes out right—well, I guess it will make us both more human—to each other, I mean."

Upon this tack, in his present state of confusion, he couldn't meet her at all, and after a hardly articulate protest, he scrambled back to the safer ground of details and arrangements. But Margaret couldn't stay on the ground. Her emotions wanted an outlet, and since Henry wouldn't be the target for them, she fell to talking about John; how inexhaustible his kindness was; how really fine he was; how superior to many people who made greater pretensions—he never made any—to the qualities of the spirit. And at last, after a sigh, "Poor old John!" she said.

She hadn't said much that he would not, in a normal mood, subscribe to, but to-night his mood was not normal, and her enthusiasm had irked him. "Why poor?" he asked captiously. "He doesn't seem very poor to me."

She stared at him and shrugged her good-looking shoulders. "You can't get away with that, Henry. Not with me. You know well enough. You know more about that, by a good deal, than I do."

He knew, instantly, what she meant and he was aware, what was worse, that he had betrayed the fact that he knew. This was always the devil of it, with him and Margaret—the way they were running upon short circuits. He said, stiffly, "I suppose you mean you're feeling sorry for him about Violet, but you're altogether wrong if you think I know any reason why you should."

He was lucky to get through with this dignified disclaimer before the possibility flashed across his mind, as it did a moment later, that Violet might have told Margaret something, anyhow, about her meeting with Joe at their

flat, for he couldn't restrain a gasp at the thought of it. His sister had turned away before that happened and was occupied extinguishing her cigarette. When she turned back she said, with heavily underscored stresses:

"Well, I don't know *anything* about it. Except that she's let herself go *silly* about your Mr. Greer. It isn't one of her flirtations; she always crams those down your throat. This thing she's trying to keep dark. She spent *hours* explaining to me why she invited him out for that week-end that I was at Lake Geneva. She'd made it so *horribly* difficult for John by getting into a stupid quarrel with the man, and John had been so decent about it, that the only thing she could do had been to make it up. And the amount she's talked about him since—not really saying anything about him—just lugging him in! Henry, there have been times when I've felt I'd *have* to slap her, just for being such a fool!"

She said this with an intensity that made Henry blink, but he managed a good-humored laugh and acknowledged that Violet *was* pretty transparent. "About this, though," he unwisely proceeded, "I've an idea she's really been plucky. She did Joe a serious injustice, I believe, and she's swallowed her pride and tried to make amends. That's just as I see it, of course."

"Well," Margaret summed up with an elaborate simulation of patience, "I've always known men were idiots about her, and I ought to be used to it." Then this manner deserted her. "I wish she would run away with him!" she said furiously, in that monotonous voice Henry dreaded. "Give John a chance to have some one around who'd treat him decently. I wish she'd go so far, just once, that she couldn't come back. She's always trying how near she can go to the edge. And she'd be nicely dished if he happened to be the man she went over with. She doesn't want him. She'd never have looked at him if she hadn't got the idiotic idea that I wanted him, myself."

He stared at her through this, horrified and helpless, as

always. But the fear he got from her look, through the short silence that followed, that she'd actually scream at him in another minute, enabled him to wrench his gaze away. The silence spun out a little longer and then he heard her give a short satiric laugh. "Oh, Henry, you're such a *fool!*" she said. "You know I don't mean anything!—Good night," she added, from the door, and left him.

10

He had, of course a diabolically bad night, sleepless save for troubled snatches of slumber during which he dreamed of Joe eloping with Violet, and himself hopelessly mixed up in it in one rôle after another and always in danger of getting shot by somebody. In his waking hours this lurid suggestion of Margaret's disturbed him very little.

The thing he had on his mind was the sale of Greer & Company stock by John and his allies, and what this portended to Joe. His damned conscience was sniping at him again upon the old question of loyalty. Should he turn over his shares to John and profit by the betrayal of Joe? Or should he warn Joe and be a traitor to John? Or should he hang on to the shares and not warn Joe—prove his good faith by participating in his ruin? A singularly sterile attitude this would be, he reflected, and—appropriately—closest to his natural impulses!

He did drop off, along toward morning, overslept, missed John's sacred train, and by a little careful dodging managed to ride into town all by himself. He decided he would return the shares to John. He'd said he would, and then, they were John's, anyhow—carried for Henry. Did this, he wondered, in any way lighten the burden of his disloyalty to Joe? No, it didn't. Not a bit.

He went straight to the bank from the train—it was late enough for that—got the shares out of his box and took them up to John's office on the top floor. John had gone out somewhere, so he saw Rollie Mill. Mindful of John's injunction to secrecy, he told Mill, discreetly, handing over the envelope, that this was something he had

brought in for John, who would understand all about it.

"Oh, the Greer stock?" asked Rollie nonchalantly.
"Good! I'll take care of it."

Well, of course, being John's interior private secretary, Rollie would know all about it. But what Rollie went on to add was far outside the secretarial domain.

"We're going to toast that baby a nice golden brown before we get done with him," he prophesied with glee. "Remember that joke he pulled up here one day, before we organized the company, about *oubliettes*, and getting out the same door he came in by? Well, that's going to be a better joke than he thought it was."

Rollie might speak frivolously, but he didn't say things like this at random. So this was all John's assertion that they had no plans—were merely playing safe—amounted to! Henry didn't want to hear any more. He knew too much, already. He left John's office in haste and plodded, drearily, across the loop to his own.

The specific thing he dreaded was a meeting with Jennie MacArthur. He had never felt quite comfortable with her since John had told him on the day of his return from France, the inside facts of Joe's ruse by which he had got control of the majority of the stock in the company. Henry had often gone over in his own mind the part Jennie had played in it. Her bringing to him the warning letter from the patent lawyers, her overriding of his tentative, though audacious, suggestion that they manage some warning to Joe before they told the others. He remembered, too, her look and her manner at the directors' table through those days of discussion.

If she had known the truth all the while, and Henry could not seriously doubt that this was the case, she had played her part well—and just as well before himself in their private talk as before the others. He couldn't blame her for this, but, nevertheless, the conclusion humiliated him. Had the situation been reversed, he could never, he knew, have played his part like that.

He had come to regard Jennie, long before that time, with a genuine and unreserved affection, and his conviction had been—a very warm and inspiring conviction, too, for Henry—that her regard for him was of the same quality. Well, he must have been mistaken about that. If she had really liked him the way he thought she did, she could not, before him, have played her part so skilfully. Some momentary hesitation, some troubled protest, would have betrayed her, however satisfactorily she might have reasoned it out that her duty was to Joe.

There was no getting away from the logic of this inference, but his instinct persisted upon making war upon it. The thing he had been wanting with a surprising intensity all those months was a candid talk with her. He wanted to say, "Look here, Jennie, did you know what Joe was up to all the time in that patent infringement business?"

Henry had had a part of his own to play ever since the April meeting, and he was miserably aware that he had played it badly. More than once he had seen Jennie looking at him curiously, perplexed, and, he thought, troubled by something she found in his manner.

From now on, of course, that situation was going to be ten times worse. He had committed an overt act in turning over those shares to John. He didn't know precisely what John's plans were, to be sure, but there was no mistaking a broad outline of them. He and Corbett and Crawford were going to slip secretly out from under, and then they were going to wreck the Greer Company. Push Joe down the *oubliette* he had once joked about.

He went straight into his private office, shut the door behind him, and sat down at his desk. Through the oak partition, he could hear Jennie dictating a letter. He was conscious of the hope that she hadn't heard him come in. He didn't ring for his own stenographer, though there confronted him on his desk two or three stacks of memoranda and letters, the grist of his morning's work. He surveyed them blankly. There was no capacity in

him for orderly thought. His mind was obsessed by a passionate longing to escape from all this coil, break out into an open space—and it wouldn't have to be very wide—where he could be free.

It had been, he ironically remembered, in the hope of obtaining this freedom that he had left the bank, and come to this very office. It was Jennie who had conducted him here, and left him with the injunction to call upon her for anything he wanted. She couldn't give him what he wanted now.

He heard her dismiss her stenographer. Then, as he had feared, there came a tap on the communicating door. He doubted if she could have heard his almost voiceless "Come in," but she opened the door, any way, and after the moment it took to exchange good mornings, deliberately closed it after her, walked around his desk, and seated herself, facing him. He looked at her hands, lightly clasped upon the plate glass desk top; but he couldn't look up at her face. He could feel her steady gaze, though, without meeting it.

"You don't look very well," she said. "Was Lake Forest too much for you?"

"I guess it was," he assented. "I played a lot of tennis Saturday afternoon—a foolish thing for a man of my habits to attempt of course. And then last night, for some reason, I couldn't sleep."

He wondered if that sounded as false to her as it did to him. Apparently it did, for after a protracted silence, she got up (not restlessly though; all her movements were gratefully firm and steady) and went to the window.

"Henry," she asked, "isn't there anything you would like to talk out with me? Something that's been on your mind—oh, for a good while, I guess. Personally, I mean, you know; man to man. We have talked like that—but not lately."

He had an appalling sensation of sliding down a smooth slope. His whole moral economy was threatened. She had hit the mark fairly with her first shot. He sat for a

while in panic-stricken silence; but she simply waited. At last he said, with a desperate affectation of nonchalance, "No, I guess not. I do worry a lot, of course, over the business, and so on. I don't suppose there's as worthless a business man at any other executive desk in town. There are times when I forget it—and there are times when it comes over me. That's all."

He thought he heard her catch her breath, and looking up at her for the first time, saw that she had turned a little farther away from him and was gazing out of the window. Then, hastily, he looked back at the meaningless papers upon his desk. Presently, she moved again, toward her own door this time. Her way lay behind his chair, and when she reached that point, she stopped. Then he felt her hands upon his shoulders, holding them strongly. Save that he was trembling all over, he sat perfectly still until—he had no idea how long it was—she took her hands away, and went back into her own office.

In an instant he had sprung up and followed her, before she had had time to seat herself at her desk.

"Jennie," he said, "there isn't a single human relation I care about in the world that isn't poisoned for me by this damnable job. I'm not going on like this. It's inhuman and impossible. I can't talk, man to man, with you or anybody, but I'm going to fix it so I can. Now—this morning."

He went back into his own office at that, without waiting for a word or a look by way of reply, caught up his hat, and went out. In a general way, it was in his mind that he would find John, and tell him to go to hell.

The intention fairly intoxicated him. He had to restrain an impulse to go leaping and singing along Jackson Boulevard as Christian went along the narrow way after the burden of his sins had rolled from his back. Why hadn't he done this long ago? Why had he tortured himself all these months? He could get himself some sort of job. It wouldn't have to be much now that Margaret was no longer on his hands. He'd get it of a stranger. Then he'd be beholden to nobody.

He rode up in the elevator to the top floor of the bank building, ready to face Goliath.

He was glad, though, to find that John was in and that he needn't wait. He didn't want any of his precious virtue to leak out of him. He said at once, without even heeding John's invitation to sit down:

"I'm going to resign from my job over at the Greer Company. I thought I'd come over here and tell you first."

"Resign from your job?" John said blankly. "What the devil . . ."

"You see, I like Joe," Henry interrupted. "No, that isn't strong enough. That isn't what I mean. Joe's one of my friends—one of my best friends—one of the few real friends I've got. You've always thought that I was making up to him for business reasons, because that was what I had been hired to do. Well, it isn't true. Never has been really, from the first day. Now you see, don't you, why I can't stay there, after I know what you're planning to do to him? I'm not going to betray any confidences—of yours, I mean, to him. I won't tell him why I got out. But if he suspects the reason, I can't help that. That's why I'm telling you first."

"Sit down," John said again, and he waited in his impassive way until Henry had done so. He took time, too, to light, carefully as he always did, a cigar. "Henry," he said judiciously, "you're a nice fellow, but you're a damned fool. You've been in business all your life, but by George, I believe you get your ideas about it from stories you read in the magazines. You've got an idea we're going after Joe Greer to ruin him. You think we're going to sell our stock on purpose to work some skulduggery that will smash him!"

"Well," Henry asked bluntly, "aren't you?"

John shrugged his thick shoulders, and heaved a patient sigh. "You ought to know by this time that we don't do silly things like that—not people like Greg and Frank Crawford and me. I never went gunning for anybody in

my life. I try to make good investments, and when I've made them, I try to protect them. I give you my word I haven't a plan in my head beyond what I told you yesterday morning.

"If anybody ruins Joe Greer, it'll be Joe Greer himself. He's the sort of man that's liable to do it. We've always known that about him. That's why we wouldn't let him have full control of the company in the first place. He's the sort of fellow that sooner or later bites off more than he can chew. Well, he's got full control of the company now. He got it by a trick—as smooth a trick, I'll say, as I ever saw put over. We can't stop him now at the directors' table. If we vote him down, he can call a special stockholders' meeting, and chuck us all out. So we're getting ready to stand from under.

"He may make good after we've got out, thinking he wasn't going to. If he does, it's our loss. Or we may hang on too long, and not be able to get out, and that'll be our loss again. But whatever we do, it won't be Greer we're thinking about. It'll be our investment that we're trying to protect. That ought to be satisfactory, I should think.—I'd like to know," he concluded reflectively, "what ever put the other idea into your head?"

Henry didn't give Rollie Mill away. "I don't know," he said. He was deeply troubled. He remembered John's impatient admission last summer that Joe would be indispensable for another year at least, and his own instructions to "keep him on the rails." And yet, John wasn't a liar, and John had just given him his solemn word that he was innocent of any plan for a campaign against Joe.

"I suppose," he said at last, "that if you do stand from under, and Joe isn't able to—chew what he has bitten off, there'll be some sort of reorganization."

John shot a quick look at him. "Well, I'll say this. I'll make this as a promise to you. If we do have to pick the thing up and reorganize it—and of course that may happen—we'll give Greer a perfectly fair chance to come in on the same terms as the rest. How's that? Will that do?"

"I haven't any right to dictate terms," Henry protested.
"And I realize you've been very patient with me."

(It was just John's patience that defeated him, lowered his exaltation, destroyed his confidence. He was the old Henry again, trembling a little, horribly in doubt.)

"I still feel, though, that my position is false over there," he went on. "I am supposed to represent your interests—to be on your side . . ."

"Forget that you are on our side," John interrupted.
"Your own sense of fair play is good enough for us. Go ahead and be treasurer, without any strings on you at all. You're valuable over there to Greer. You're an important part of his organization."

He got up, with a laugh, and slapped his wife's cousin on the back. "Forget it, Henry. Run along back to your office. You must have had a bad night."

"I did," Henry admitted feebly. "But I've been worrying about this for a great deal longer than that."

"Well, you've got it off your chest now, anyhow. Sorry I can't ask you to lunch, but I've got some people waiting for me."

Henry walked back to his own office, no longer buoyant, feeling a fool, wondering what he was going to say to Jennie.

But this, oddly enough, did not prove difficult. He did not see her till after lunch, and then she met him with a matter upon which she wanted his advice. A man who said he was a special article writer for a popular scientific magazine had telephoned and asked if he might come over and talk to her with the idea of getting a story. Did Henry think there would be any objection to her seeing him? She was rather curious to find out just what he wanted. Henry didn't see the smallest objection, and said so, whereupon she nodded and went back into her office.

They had met. Their normal every-day relation was reestablished as if the explosion of the morning had never occurred. But, somehow, he couldn't feel satisfied to let it

go at that, and five minutes later he followed her in and sat down on the corner of her desk.

"I've come back, Jennie," he said. "When I went off this morning, I didn't think I would. I'd misunderstood something John Williamson said yesterday, and it had been—preying on my mind. It was the climax, really, of a series of misunderstandings. I'd had the idea that they regarded me as some one—well, retained in their special interest rather than in the company's, a perfectly false position, of course. But John has just assured me that isn't so. They don't consider there are any strings tied to me, at all. I'm treasurer of this company, and I'm nothing else. So it's all right. That's what I blew up about. I know I must look—well, a good bit of a fool, to you."

She didn't smile, as his tone at the end had invited her to do, nor look up at him. She sat very still, for a moment, without speaking. Then she said, "I think you are one of the bravest people I've ever known."

He laughed at that, but not ironically. "It did take a sort of courage to go over and tell John to go to the devil, but it wasn't mine. It came from your hands. I've never been—taken hold of like that, not that I can remember, in all my life."

She flushed, and the hands he had spoken of, which had been lying easily on the desk before her, disappeared beneath it. This time she said nothing at all.

"I'm much obliged, Jennie," he concluded, after a while, and then went back into his own office.

11

Jennie's principal concern that summer was the problem of marketing the raw flax which they were under contract to buy as it was delivered during the fall and winter by the subsidiary companies. There was going to be a lot of it—over thirty million pounds—and the only comfortable way to handle it would be by securing in advance contracts with jobbers or spinners, under which they could keep it turning over as fast as it came in.

She and Henry had, as well as they could, attended to the preliminaries of this undertaking. They had surveyed the whole textile field, more or less. They had made promising follow-up campaigns in all quarters where it seemed likely that an interest in their product could be aroused. The textile world had shown no lack of interest in the Greer process. Engineers came out to visit the laboratory, mills took their samples, letters came in from everywhere.

The only disquieting phenomenon about all this activity was that it never got beyond the preliminary stage. The experts came and looked, went away and experimented, and made their reports, in the main highly favorable; but these reports seemed to disappear into some vast inane which gave back nothing, not even a responsive echo. By the middle of September, Jennie was frankly alarmed about it. And in Henry, this alarm was amplified many fold.

It troubled them both, too, that they couldn't arouse Joe to the seriousness of the situation. His attitude still seemed to be, as well as they could make it out from his irregular, inadequate letters, that getting out the flax was of paramount importance, just as getting out the gold was of paramount importance if you were operating a gold mine. If they had the only adequate supply of good stuff to meet a real demand, they needn't worry about selling it. The shoe was on the other foot.

"I can't see," Jennie confided to Henry, "why he's staying around up there. All but two or three of those mills have already got stuff coming through. I've done all I can in the way of writing letters to get him back. He says he'll come about the first of the month. You know, I think somebody, one of us, ought to go up there and talk to him."

Henry thought this a good idea, but insisted that there was no question about Jennie's being the one to go. "You can talk up to him, which is something I never could do in the world."

"I've been talking up to him for seven or eight years, off and on," Jennie pointed out. "He's used to me. You've never tried to, and you might have a lot more effect." But he looked so acutely miserable over this suggestion, that Jennie hastily agreed to make the journey.

She said to Henry when he greeted her on the morning of her return, and asked her what luck she had had with Joe: "We'll have lunch together somewhere, Henry, and then I'll tell you. I don't want to talk about it here."

That she had come upon something seriously disturbing during her visit, her manner made plain enough, but she gave Henry no clue to the nature of it until they were seated at a corner table in the old Stratford dining-room and had got rid of the waiter. Then, however, she came straight to the point.

"I didn't get anything out of Joe," she said. "He won't come back to Chicago until the first of October. He's acting queer about that—stubborn. Wouldn't listen to reason at all. And even if he did come, I don't believe he'd be much help to us, the way he is right now."

"Do you mean there's anything the matter with him? Isn't he—well?"

"He's drinking too much," Jennie answered bluntly.

Henry made a grimace at that. The picture her words formed in his mind was of nightly bucolic carousals. "How did you find out about it?" he asked after a moment of unhappy meditation. "Did they talk to you about it?"

"They don't know," she said. "Nobody knows. He doesn't get drunk, Henry. You wouldn't know, unless you'd always known him, that there was anything wrong. He just drinks."

"Well, but he's always drunk whisky—like water," Henry protested. "I never could see that it affected him at all."

"He doesn't drink it like water now. That is exactly how he used to drink it—without thinking anything about it; whenever he was thirsty. But now . . . Oh, it was

rotten to see him like that. He's ashamed about it. But he needs it. After he's been around with you a while, he makes an excuse for going away by himself to get it, because he can't stand it any longer without it. It just happened that I found it out, and when I did it made me—sick.—No, I didn't say anything to him about it. What would be the use? It's been going on a long while, I guess. Since before he went north this spring."

Henry remembered the drink he'd seen Joe take after the April meeting, and the look Joe had shot at him when he commented on it. Half incredulous as he remained after Jennie's report, he was still horrified. "Something ought to be done about it," he said. "It's—ghastly, if it's really as bad as it seemed to you."

"It is," she asserted. "I'm not mistaken about that. But he's the only person who can do anything about it. When he gets around to it, I suppose he will. When he's got over the thing that drove him to it. It is ghastly, of course, but I don't believe anything like that will ever get Joe, permanently. I think, perhaps, from things he's said, that he's been like this before. Never since I've known him, though. Oh, I've known him to go on horrible sprees, of course. Lasting a whole week sometimes. But he only laughed at them. This is different."

These revelations were so appalling to Henry that he quite forgot what Jennie's original errand to the North had been, along with the apprehensions which had caused her to undertake it. Not so, Jennie. She came back to flax.

"They aren't as happy up there as they were when Joe was organizing those subsidiaries," she told Henry. "They're furious over the way wheat's gone down. They think it's all the doings of the speculators. They're worried over tight money and the way the banks are shutting down on new credits. They think that's part of a conspiracy, too."

"Oh, we've all got our troubles, I suppose," Henry remarked from rather far afield; "and our own always seem like the only ones in the world."

"These are our troubles I'm talking about," she told him crisply. "That is, they're going to be. You see, practically all those little flax companies borrowed the money that they bought the straw with. It was easy enough to get, then. But now the local banks are wanting those notes paid up, and that means that the subsidiaries won't be able to give us any time at all. They'll draw on us, as soon as they can begin to ship, cash against bills of lading. We'll have to begin meeting those drafts in a couple of weeks. We're all right for a while, of course, but this is going to run into millions, Henry. And the stuff we're going to buy, until we've established a market for it, isn't anything the banks will take for collateral, either."

A prediction of John Williamson stabbed through Henry's memory like a neuralgia. "Sooner or later, this man Greer will bite off more than he can chew." Had he already done it? Henry wondered. And then Jennie startled him by mentioning John herself. She suggested that Henry go and talk to him. Not to ask for anything more than advice, of course, though he might be able to put them in touch with some one who knew the jobbing game better than they did. Bankers had all sorts of connections like that. Anyhow, Mr. Williamson had not been in the office for several weeks and he ought to be kept informed of the general situation.

Henry didn't much want to do this. He'd been avoiding John of late, on instinct rather than from any formidable reason, but this wasn't a fact he cared to confess to Jennie, so he said he would go. He telephoned him that same afternoon and John invited him to lunch at the Union League the next day—to Henry's relief at getting out of a visit to John's office. He had conceived a positive horror of another encounter with Rollie Mill.

John proved friendly and in the upshot rather reassuring than otherwise. He seemed to think it natural enough that their progress had been slow with the big jobbers and that nothing much would be gained by trying to hurry

them. The times were a bit unsettled and nobody wanted to commit himself any sooner than he had to. If Greer was coming back in a fortnight or so (Henry had forbore to mention the fact that Jennie had been up to see him) that would be time enough. He could run down to New York and very likely close up everything in a week. Those things usually happened all at once.

They talked through the meal in this comfortable vein, and then when they began to smoke John leaned back in his chair and asked Henry where he'd been all this while. They'd seen nothing of him for weeks. Henry leaned back, too, with a sigh of relief as he realized that business was finished and that John was not going to ask any questions about Joe nor say anything about the sale of the stock. He answered that he'd been pretty busy, and Margaret, too, with her new job, but that they'd both been meaning to get around for a long while.

"Violet asks about you every few days," John told him. "Seems to have you on her mind. Dorothy, too. You're a great favorite with her, Henry. You'll have to come around pretty soon if you're going to see her before she goes away. She's leaving about the first of October."

"Leaving?" Henry inquired, surprised. "I thought she'd come home to stay for a while."

"So did I," said John, in a tone that was nearer angry than one often heard from him, "but it seems we were mistaken. She's going abroad for the winter, to a school in Florence. Violet's got it figured out that she's too young to come out yet, and says she doesn't want her hanging around all the year at a loose end. It sounds reasonable enough when she talks about it, but damn it, I was hoping for a chance to get acquainted with the child myself. After she starts going out to dinners and dances on her own every night, I won't have a look in."

"What does Dodo say about it herself?" Henry asked. "She want to go?"

"Says she does. One of her particular friends at Thornycroft is going, and it's a wonderful school, and so

on; but I've got sort of an idea. . . . However, there it is. October first, she goes."

Henry inquired if Violet were going over with her.

"No," John said. "The other girl's mother is to take the pair of them. That is unless Margaret's planning to go about that time. I hadn't thought to ask about that, nor Violet either, I guess. How about it?"

But Margaret, Henry said, had found she wasn't going to be able to get off till after Christmas.

"I don't know what Violet's planning to do," John added, as they left the table. "She's been so busy lately getting Dodo packed off that I don't believe she's had time to think."

12

Between Dorothy's sailing date and Joe's for his return to Chicago there was a direct relation. Back in August he had received this letter from Violet:—

"I asked Henry the other day when you were coming back and he said he thought within two or three weeks. At first I was glad, for it seems a long time since that Fourth of July week-end, but I've come to think I don't want to see you again with Dorothy about. She *looks* at me, Joe—Margaret looks at me, too, as if she'd like to slay me, and I don't mind a bit. She's never forgiven me and I suppose never will. Dorothy is as dear as she can be, fond of me, and admires me and all that, but sometimes she makes me feel a fool. I couldn't stand it—

"We've decided she's to go to school for one more year—she is too young to come out—in Italy and she sails about the first of October, a little late that is but I can't get her ready any sooner. The Hallams, New York people, are putting their girl in the same school and she'll go over with them. I suppose I shall go to New York and see her off, and then I'll come home and there won't be anybody—

"I know if you came to Chicago before that, we'd be seeing each other—and I'd *hate* it. So I'm hoping you *will* come—then. I wonder if that seems idiotic to you?"

It did not seem idiotic to Joe. It seemed sensitive, high-minded, thoroughbred. It added a glamorous brush-

stroke or two to the romantic portrait of Violet his fancy had been so industriously painting. Also it fed his hopes. He read into its broken sentences admissions which fell but little short of promises. He gave her no hint of this, however, in his answer to her letter. It was not so much that he distributed his powers of expression on paper as that he hated to forego, in any matter where the stake was serious, the uncanny advantage he derived from his sensitivity to personal contacts. All he told her in his matter-of-fact reply was that he was sure his business would keep him in the North until October first. Another letter of hers furnished him further details, the exact date of sailing and the name of the ship, when they planned to leave Chicago, and so on, and this had an influence not fully acknowledged to himself in the forming of his own plans.

Jennie's visit in mid-September accomplished more with him than she supposed. It had seemed to her that he barely listened to her, but his mind, his thinking machine that is to say, un intoxicated either by alcohol or by romance, took it all in, set it in order, and summed it up. There wasn't anything seriously amiss, he decided. It was just that Jennie, with all her clarity of judgment and all her energy, lacked the high-voltage current in her veins that it took to jump a gap, produce a lightning flash, finish a thing up. This lack was about all that kept her from being as good a man as he was. When this was called for, she needed him.

Within a week of her return to Chicago, Joe conceived an attractive project. He'd go straight to New York from here, by way of the "Soo," and close his contracts for the year's output of raw linen before he came back October first. It would be fun to see their faces, Jennie's and Henry's, long and solemn enough when he came in, change when he tossed down those papers on his desk before their eyes. That would show them whether he was the old Joe or not!

The other not quite acknowledged half of the picture was his accidental meeting with Violet after Dorothy's

boat had sailed. It would be easy enough to manage since he knew the hotel the Williamsons were addicted to in New York; they'd both talked about it. He wouldn't go near her, indeed he'd take pains to avoid a chance meeting, until the child was out of the way, but the possibilities offered by the subsequent handful of hours were breathtaking—especially if by that time he had his signed contracts in his pocket.

He felt no serious doubt of his success in this. On the train east he read all the correspondence between his Chicago office and the New York houses they had been trying to land. No, he didn't wonder Jennie had failed. You didn't galvanize people into taking drastic action by writing them pleasantly reasonable letters. You had to exhibit opportunity in such colors and odors and propinquity that their mouths watered for it, and then let them see it slipping away—into the clutch of somebody else!

But from the start, on Monday morning, he met unforeseen difficulties. He found plenty of people who were glad to talk with him but these were the hirelings, experts and such. The big people, to a baffling degree, were inaccessible; physically inaccessible in the first place, and when he had got into their bodily presence, spiritually. Their urbanity disconcerted him and drove him, when he tried to assert himself, to the opposite manner, which, he was aware, only made the abyss between them wider. They were like Williamson, only worse. Before the week was over he was wishing he had John there as an ally. They wouldn't be so damn superior with him!

There were moments, too, though these only occurred when he needed a drink, when he wondered whether he himself was really the man he'd been a year ago. Would not that man have had a spark in him irresistible enough to have jumped this gap—wide as it was? But a good big drink of whisky or so availed as a rule to wash this agonizing question out of his thoughts.

He spent Saturday morning alone in his room. His week's campaign had ended perforce on Friday when

everybody who could be any good to him disappeared, from the haunts of trade at any rate, for the week-end. It had got him nowhere. But—hadn't it? No nearer his goal, certainly. Yet he could not quite ignore an impression he had caught from the last man he had talked to. This man, pleasant enough and not too obviously in a hurry to be rid of him, had once or twice, at some assertion of Joe's, permitted himself to smile, faintly and a little impatiently, as if he *knew* there was nothing to be dreaded from his competitors. Was this bland non-committal attitude he had been meeting everywhere a thing agreed upon? It was not a pleasant sort of hunch to get.

Only a corner of his mind, though, was concerned with this question. The rest of it was watching the clock. It was ten o'clock and Violet and Dorothy would be leaving the hotel in a taxi for the pier; ten-thirty, and they would be getting aboard; eleven, and they'd have seen the luggage stowed away, met the other woman and her daughter. The agent of the line would be bustling about arranging special privileges, instructing the purser and the head stewards. Eleven-thirty; the gongs beating "All ashore!" and Violet contentedly ignoring them until the last minute before they began casting off the gangplank lashings. Would she wait at the pier-head for the last wave of a handkerchief? Joe got restlessly out of his chair and then sat down again. He had considered going down to the gate to the pier at about this time and intercepting Violet there, where there would be no chance of missing her, but had reluctantly decided against it. There could be no look of accident about an encounter like that and it might be awkward. Suppose, for instance, some of her New York friends had gone along with her to see the girl off. Violet would be furious with him for butting into a party like that. No, it was safer to stick to the hotel and trust to luck.

It was a small hotel as these go in New York, and its plan suited admirably with the stratagem Joe had in mind. There was but one entrance and it was possible to get a

table in the main restaurant, to the left as you went in, that commanded it. Joe could take a seat here, order his lunch, and await Violet's appearance at his leisure.

An irritating misadventure befell him soon after he'd chosen his table and given the waiter his indifferent order. Another guest entering the restaurant whom Joe had looked at without seeing stopped suddenly in the act of passing his table, stared at him, slapped him heavily on the shoulder, and called him Joe. If he could have decomposed the fellow into his elements with a wish, he would have done so. His memory was at a loss for him at first, and when it got him, it didn't help much. A chap named Snell, he was, whom Joe had known pretty well but regarded little, years ago down in Santiago de Chile.

But to Snell, unhappily, the encounter was an event to make much of. Ignoring the want of an invitation, he sat down at Joe's table and began pouring out his story of the intervening years. His only regret was that he hadn't known enough to come to New York sooner. There was no other place like it for easy money. The people down here didn't wait for you to take it away from them; they came and handed it to you. Perfectly straight legitimate business, of course, he was talking about. There was nothing in the crooked stuff; it wasn't big enough.

What was he in? Oh, anything that came along. He'd cleaned up big on one or two moving-picture promotions, but the real standby was the curb. He'd made an enormous thing in the recent raids on some of the big industrials. He didn't mind telling Joe that in one week on So-and-So alone he won a quarter of a million dollars. Snell didn't claim any credit particularly, he said, for his success. The system was perfectly simple: you cut your losses and let your winnings ride. All a man needed was nerve and a good hunch. The trouble was that most men who had the nerve lacked the hunch, and most who had the hunch lacked the nerve.

This would have annoyed Joe more bitterly than it did if he'd half listened to it. He was watching with an in-

tense concentration of his faculties, the slice of the lobby that Violet would have to cross when she came into the hotel. Quarter to one! If she was coming at all, it would be soon. Snell glided on—he was sitting sidelong to the table now and leaning confidentially toward Joe—to dwell upon the Capuan delights which the city offered its conquerors. Some town! Why only last night he had been in on a small party where one of the guests had been no less a person than Polly Price herself. Polly Price! The girl that had married four millionaires in three years, and dug into all of them pretty deep at that. Snell dispassionately pronounced that he couldn't see her; didn't know how she got away with it. Certainly she'd never get any hundred thousand dollar "lavaleers" out of him. But there were others, all right, less expensive—not that Snell minded that, though—and a whole lot better. Joe had once been quite a lady's man himself. If he was interested . . .

The words fell on an ear that was at last totally deaf. Joe saw, pausing a moment at the head of the shallow stairway and then turning toward the restaurant, not Violet, but her husband.

For a moment the sight of him was blankly incredible, and for another after that the wild idea darted about in his brain that Williamson had come suspecting something amiss—a rendezvous! Impossible of course. Violet herself had known nothing of Joe's coming to New York. He had himself in hand again, at least as far as appearances went, before John's eye fell upon him, and was able to return his nod composedly enough. John looked surprised to see him there, but not startled. He moved a few steps toward Joe's table, but after a glance at Snell, sheered off and seated himself at the other side of the room.

An almost unbearable sense of frustration settled upon Joe. Williamson's presence was explicable enough. He'd come down to see his daughter off to Europe, either with his wife or in her stead. Perhaps Violet had after all changed her mind and gone off to Italy with Dorothy. Anyhow the hope of a few untrammeled hours with her,

which he'd been leaning on, much more heavily than he had realized, was broken.

After a few minutes of gloomy cogitation it seemed necessary that he talk to John at once. He pushed back his chair and rose. "There's a man just came in," he said to Snell, "that I had a sort of date with for lunch. I guess I'd better go over and join him. Glad I saw you."

"So'm I," said Snell heartily. "Look me up some time." He told Joe his address and insisted he write it down. "And," he added confidentially, "if you want to meet any classy girls . . ."

"Or want three or four million dollars?" Joe interrupted with a dry grin.

"Well, that wouldn't stump me, either," Snell retorted a little truculently. He twisted his mouth as he spoke as if he were shifting a cigar into one corner of it. "Look me up, anyhow," he concluded cordially.

Joe said he would, and crossed the room to John Williamson's table.

"Sit down," John said cheerfully. "Did you just get in to-day?"

"Been here all the week," Joe told him.

John frowned. "Not in this hotel, have you?"

"No," Joe said. "I happened to be down the street a little way, and I ran in for lunch."

John explained, too. "I thought I would have bumped into you, that's all, if you had been staying here. I've been here three or four days myself. Just been seeing my daughter off to Europe."

"Did your wife go with her?" Joe asked. He had spoken out of a dry throat, and the words reverberated harshly in his own ears, but apparently the question sounded casual enough to Williamson.

"No," he answered. "She's at home."

"Have you moved into town yet?" Joe inquired.

John told him they were still out in Lake Forest. They hardly ever came in as early as this. Best month in the year, October was. No time like it for horseback riding.

Joe began to wonder, fantastically, if John was trying to torment him with this picture of Violet, alone, unguarded, cantering along the bridle paths. Why had John come to New York in her place? Was the change of plan his doing, or hers? He certainly looked damned well satisfied with himself, munching away at his thick English chop.

"By the way," he asked, when he had deliberately disposed of a mouthful, "what luck are you having with your raw linen—marketing it, I mean? It seems to have been worrying Henry and Miss MacArthur quite a bit."

"That's what I'm down here on," said Joe. "—God, how I hate this town!" he added.

John said it wasn't such a bad town when you knew your way about in it.

"Well, I guess the trouble with me must be that I don't know my way about," Joe admitted. "I've been getting an idea the last day or two that these different people I've been talking to are all in cahoots."

John stared at him. "Good God, man!" he said. "Of course they are. Most of the industries that are administered from New York are pretty well tied together inside themselves. But the textiles! Good lord!"

"Well, I don't know anything about that," Joe grumbled. "That's out of my beat, I guess. It looked like a perfectly straight merchandising proposition to me. I had something good that they wanted. But this inside stuff . . . Look here, Williamson, I don't see why this shouldn't be put up to you. Why don't you stay on for two or three days—and earn your dividends?" He managed to throw in a smile with this, but it didn't take off much of the edge of his words. "You can play this pussy-foot game. You know all the inside stuff."

"I'm afraid I can't take it on," John said. "I've got to be home Monday morning for an important meeting."

The lightness combined with the finality of his tone stung Joe to a flare of temper. "Damn it, Williamson," he said, leaning suddenly forward, half across the table,

"this is serious. We've got thirty million pounds of that stuff coming in that we've got to buy at an agreed price. It's beginning to come in now. We've got to sell it or we're swamped."

John moved his chair a few inches back from the table, and leaned back in it. "Do you mean to say," he asked quietly, "that you've committed yourself as deep as that, without having made any arrangement whatever in advance for turning the stuff over or for carrying it? You're in a very serious position, if that's the case."

"You've known that that was the case from the beginning." Joe was as quiet now as John, and very alert. "You made no criticism of that plan at the April meeting."

"I certainly assumed that your program involved taking care of your commitments," John assured him steadily. After a moment, he went on. "Times have changed a lot since April. That was the end of a boom. This thing that's on us now is the beginning of a panic, I think. That's the general expectation here in New York, anyhow. I very much doubt if you can sell that flax here before the first of the year—and not then unless times change for the better."

"Well, if you are right about that," Joe said, after a thoughtful silence, "why, it takes us over into your department."

"My department?"

"I mean we'll have to be carried. We'll have to borrow money. A devil of a lot of money, too."

"I don't think it's a banking proposition, if that's what you mean. The stuff is not collateral, if you can't sell it."

"Whatever you want to call it, it's up to you.—It's up to your crowd, I mean. I have carried my end of the load. I've made thirty million pounds of raw linen out of stuff that farmers were burning in the fields. There it is. It's good useful stuff. It's got value. There's no argument about that. And now, I say it's your turn. That's plain enough, isn't it?—Hell! We're all in the same boat."

"If that's your position," John answered mildly, "of course we'll have to take some action on it. It's much too important a matter for me to deal with offhand. I'll have to talk it over with Crawford and Corbett. But you are quite right; it ought to be done soon. We'll talk it over and let you know—say Wednesday afternoon. Come up to my office then—oh, about four o'clock—and we'll have something in the way of a program to offer. I've got to run along. I'm taking the Century this afternoon. You aren't taking that train, are you?"

Joe shook his head. "Waiting over till Monday, I think," he said. "All right. Wednesday afternoon at four, then."

13

Joe went back to his hotel, a modest little one in the upper Twenties, withdrew to his own room, where already he had passed the morning, drank the whisky he needed, telegraphed his address to Jennie MacArthur and said she could look for him Tuesday, and then spent most of the afternoon writing a letter to Violet. The intention—or better, the necessity—of doing this, had imbedded itself in his mind early in the course of his talk with John, and the ultimate turn this talk had taken had in no way shunted him off.

Williamson's complacent, superior ways had exasperated Joe; so had his hollow disclaimer of responsibility for the financial predicament in which the company seemed likely to find itself, and his professional banker's manner of saying he would discuss this serious situation with his friends and let Joe know—Wednesday at four o'clock—what they thought about it. But none of this had sunk into him very deep. He had caught nothing sinister in John's use of the pronoun *you* instead of *we*. He had seen no commenting flicker in John's eye, upon his "Hell! We're all in the same boat." He was still angrier with him for having come to New York in his wife's stead than for anything else John had done or might be planning to do.

Writing to her was the only balm he could apply to the

burning pain of this disappointment. The letter began stiffly—it was the first love-letter he had ever written to Violet, or to any woman for that matter—but after the first few sentences he ceased to be conscious of it as a thing that must go through the post-office in an envelope, to be read at Lake Forest on Monday morning along with the rest of Violet's mail. It became a simple unmediated release of a coiled spring of emotions which had been wound up by waiting past the breaking point. He reproached her with having spoiled his plan by not coming to New York, and then reproached himself with having, perhaps, spoiled hers by not having come to Chicago. Had it been to wait for him there that she had sent her husband off with Dorothy? He told her crudely how he wanted her, and how unbearably too hard the waiting had become. He didn't want her by crumbs and bits, John Williamson's leavings, even though what John took were nothing that a man—a real man, not a fatted ox—would want. He might come to Chicago early in the week, or he might not, but in no case would he come to her until she sent for him. She must know her mind by now . . .

There were sheets and sheets of this.

The utter recklessness of despatching a missive of this sort to a woman who was living upon any sort of terms with her husband was apparent enough to him, but it suited his mood. He gathered the scrawled and blotted sheets into an envelope, addressed and stamped it, took it out, and dropped it down the chute by the elevator. Then he came back into his room, lay down on the bed, dressed as he was, and almost at once fell deeply asleep.

He was awakened several hours later by a pounding on his door, and when he opened it and angrily demanded what the devil the row was about, he was told by an obviously relieved bellboy that Chicago was trying to get him on the telephone. They had rung his bell several times without rousing him. He was still in a half stupefied condition when he went to the telephone. He made out that it was Jennie MacArthur who was calling him. She had

been trying to get him, she said, ever since receiving his telegram late that afternoon. The wire was clear enough, but he had trouble making out what she wanted. She was talking about some stock. Had he been selling any?

"Stock in what?" he asked.

"Stock in the Greer Company, Joe," she told him.
"Have you been selling any of yours?"

He told her she must be crazy to ask him a thing like that. Of course he hadn't. What had put such an idea into her head?

"Well, there's a lot of it for sale," she told him. "Up in Fargo and other places. There's a lot of it sold already, I guess. It's the other crowd that's selling it, then."

He asked her, angrily, what other crowd she meant.

"I'll write you all I know about it to-night," she told him, in a rather odd-sounding voice. "I'll send it special delivery so you'll get it the first thing Monday morning." He told her this would be all right, he guessed, and at that she hung up. He undressed and went back to bed.

His memory of this incident when he awakened Sunday morning was, oddly enough, perfectly clear. And of course, now that his mind was working again, the inference from what she had told him was clear, too. For a long time he lay contemplating it—it and other matters, too, in a sort of crystalline detachment.

Williamson and Corbett and Crawford had sold out—stood from under. They had sold their stock right up there in the flax country, too. Under his own nose. Where belief in the company's great future ran highest, and where they could get the best price. They covered their tracks cleverly, too, never to have attracted his eye. It was queer that they should have been able to do that without ever giving him a hint to put him on his guard.

But why had they done it? Simply because they fore-saw bad times, and they wanted to convert a dubious chance of millions into a sure recovery of their investment?

Joe didn't think it likely. They were expecting something better than that.

They were playing him for a fool. Well, he was one. He had been quite unaccountably a fool—for months, blindly unaware of what was going on about him. Williamson had started back to Chicago under the satisfied conviction that he had been a fool. "It's your turn now," Joe had said to him. Well, that was what they thought. That was what they had been waiting for. They'd be talking it over this Sunday afternoon—the three of them. Down in Williamson's gun-room, like enough. Smiling over the simplicity of his turning to them—*to them*—for help.

He didn't waste much time trying to forecast the terms of the offer they would have ready for him Wednesday afternoon. The broad outline of the situation was plain enough. In default of selling his flax, he would have to borrow the money to pay for it, and as the price of finding the money for him, they would exact their pound of flesh; namely, his share in the enterprise which his imagination had conceived and his energy made real. What particular form of hocus pocus under the polite name of reorganization they resorted to, didn't matter.

Well he was broad awake now. He knew exactly the task that lay before him. He would have to market his flax, or he would have to find the money to carry it, not only without their help, but against their relentless opposition. How long, he wondered, had they been opposing him? How much of the bland indifference he had been chafing at during the past week had been their doing? That, like enough, had been Williamson's business in New York. And Joe, like a gull, had sat there at the lunch table yesterday, babbling of his troubles.

This was the thing that worried him—his own fatuous heedlessness. He had understood these fellows well enough at the beginning; taken his precautions against them. During these past months he had been like a man drugged. Never mind that; he was awake now.

Perhaps too late—but perhaps not. Certainly he would need all his wits to meet this next week. No good wasting

time going to Chicago to listen to the terms of the bargain they'd propose to him. He'd tell Jennie to go to the meeting. Tell her, too, to keep them in the dark as to where he was and what he was doing. She could play that part of the game all right. She saw things pretty straight, Jennie did. In a sort of way, she had seen this coming. It must have been in her mind when she came all the way to Fargo to talk to him. Damn it, why didn't she talk out? Make him see it. Her manner had struck him as queer on that visit; as if she was worried about him. He wondered how she had discovered that the other crowd were selling out. It was queer she hadn't mentioned it last night when she talked to him, instead of saying she'd write, and hanging up in that sudden way.

The semi-somnolent, luminous, disembodied period came to an end when he got out of bed. He wanted a drink. That was the first thing. He went over to the bag where he kept his bottle, but it wasn't there. Then he remembered, and turned back to the desk where he had sat writing so long. That was yesterday afternoon. There stood the bottle, but it was empty. Queer! It had been practically full when he had opened it on coming in from his lunch with Williamson, and he hadn't been out of the room except to walk down the corridor to mail that letter to Violet.

The contents of that letter, forgotten until now, began coming back into his mind as he stood staring at the disordered desk and the empty whisky bottle. He couldn't remember consecutively what he had said, but phrases and fragments that came back into his mind were unbelievable—appalling. He did remember the mere physical bulk of the thing as he had hefted it in his hand on his way to the mail chute.

He had been drunk when he wrote that letter. No getting away from that. He had been drunk, too, when Jennie telephoned—and she had known it. That was why her voice had changed in that strange way, and why she had hung up with that mere promise to write. He had got

drunk without meaning to, and without recognizing his condition when he was in it. That letter to Violet! What could he do about it? Telegraph her to return it unopened, or to destroy it unread? He looked at his watch. Eleven o'clock—ten in Chicago. It was too late to risk the comparative publicity of a telegram. Williamson himself would be home before it arrived, and it would as likely as not fall into his hands. Then the fat *would* be in the fire.—He needed a drink. That was all that was the matter with him. He would be able to think after he had had a drink.

He was on the way to the bell to summon the boy who provided him with liquor, when he stopped short, turned back, and lay down again upon the bed. He was clammy with sweat. His whole body was crying out for the drink he wanted. But the thing that frightened him was the realization, brought home at last, that this was what had been the matter with him for months. In a way, he had known it all along. His shame over the habit gave him away; his careful concealment from his associates of the amount of whisky it took to see him through the day.

He got up and took the empty bottle and the glass into the bathroom, washed them out thoroughly, and then washed his hands. The only way to quit was to quit.

There had been nothing in Joe's experience that was comparable with the tortures of the ensuing week, unless it were the unreckoned period of time when he had wandered, starved and consumed by fever, alone in the Amazon jungle, a nightmare that had come to its climax when he had torn aside the curtain of thatch which hung over one gable end of a community hut and staggered within, expecting to be transfixed upon a native spear.

He was starving now, for food was something he could hardly bring himself to touch; he was consumed by what seemed like thirst, except that no drink he would take could satisfy it; he was dragged down by a heavy lassitude; his nervous irritability was that of a man excoriated; he was utterly and terribly alone. Worst of all—and this

was a thing that had no parallel in his fight with the jungle—was the obsession that one drink, even a small drink, of whisky would make him instantly himself again. He asserted to himself that this was a lie; that at the worst he was a better man than the muzzy-witted fool he had been for the past six months; but this was an assertion that he had constantly to make anew.

The only thing that supported him was the other fight he was engaged in, the fight to keep himself and the enterprise which he had made a part of himself out of the waiting clutches of John Williamson and his friends.

Jennie's letter when it came on Monday morning made it clear that they must have been waiting and ready for a good while. It was an inquiry from the Blue Sky Commission in one of the flax-growing states that had revealed to her what had happened. Stock in the Greer Company was being so extensively traded in that the status of the company was a matter of official concern. There was no doubt in Jennie's mind, nor in Joe's that the other crowd were completely unloaded.

Joe got her at once on the telephone and told her that he was going to keep on trying to market the flax in New York. He was going after a new lot of people. There was no use fooling with the old bunch any more, who were no doubt sewed up by Williamson. He wasn't going to waste time, either, going to Chicago to hear what the banker and his associates had to say. Jennie should go to the meeting and receive their terms, and transmit them to him. Also she was to avoid saying anything about his plans or present whereabouts. He ended the conversation by telling her that she wasn't to feel discouraged. He believed he was going to win out yet.

It surprised and encouraged him that he could command so cheerful and natural a tone. It sounded all right to her, evidently—and her relief at it was plain to him. Yet it seemed to him that his own voice was that of another man. He himself, if he could have spoken, would only have cried out in torment. This strange sense of duality

persisted throughout the week. He himself was there, but he heard the other man presenting his case. Presenting it well, lucidly, persuasively, while he, Joe Greer, was hardly capable of consecutive thought.

He had begun, as he told Jennie he meant to do, with a new crowd, none of them as big as the men in the inner ring; outsiders, but capable of being welded, he thought, into a ring of their own. He worked upon them singly. He drew them into little groups, and after a while felt them coming his way. The evidences—straws he would not have been capable of perceiving a week ago—were pointing toward success.

But on Friday, when he had talked to a dozen of them together at a prearranged lunch, this reawakened sensitiveness of his told him the tide had turned against him. He tried to shout this instinct down, tried to attribute it to his own exhausted condition—but it would not do. He worked with them until four o'clock that afternoon, but when they left him with friendliest professions of interest and promises of further consideration, he knew he was beaten.

He went back to the hotel, and there found Jennie's letter containing in full the terms offered by Williamson, Corbett and Crawford. The mental effort involved in reading the letter was an agony in itself (one drink now—one drink, and it would all be easy) and he spent most of the evening mastering the details of it. In the broad outline, however, it was simple enough. The first move had been on Monday morning when the three of them formally tendered their resignations as directors in the Greer Company, the reason being offered in each case that they were no longer stockholders in the company. They now proposed to organize a new corporation which would enter into a five-year contract with the Greer Company to buy the entire output of raw flax which the Greer Company was permitted to buy from the subsidiaries, at the price which the Greer Company had paid the subsidiaries plus a broker's commission of one-eighth of one per cent.

The Greer Company was given thirty days in which to accept this offer.

Joe grinned savagely over the neatness of the thing. He was to be left undisturbed in control of the Greer Company. The Greer Company was to be saved from bankruptcy, allowed to collect its meager royalties if it could, and a broker's commission of one-eighth of one per cent. upon its sales. The subsidiaries, too, would be paid the letter of their bond. They'd get their manufacturer's profit—twenty per cent. over the cost of material and labor for processing the flax. In a word, they and the Greer Company were to be left holding the bag. All the real profits would go to the new corporation.

And yet, there was nothing, so far as Joe could see, illegal or even unethical about the proposal. Here was a company rescued from impending bankruptcy; all its technical obligations met; its continued functioning assured. As Joe had once said to Jennie, having the right on their side was one of the best things those fellows did. But the right was more profitable to them than any vulgar wrecking operation could be—by just the subsidiaries, one-half share in the profit of merchandising the flax!

Well, they hadn't got it yet. He still had thirty days in which to keep on trying to find either a more favorable market for the flax, or credit that would enable him to carry it. He wasn't really angry until the following morning when he received an astonishing note from Williamson, forwarded by Jennie from his office.

The offer they had made to the Greer Company was the best, John said, that they felt was justified in view of the present bad times and uncertain market conditions. He did not, however, wish to give Greer personally any justification for feeling that he was being squeezed out in the new arrangement. Any amount, therefore, up to three million dollars, that Greer might wish to invest in the new corporation would be accorded its due share in the issuance of the stock. He didn't know, he said, whether Joe's connection with the old company would embarrass

him in going into the new or not, but this, at any rate, was his own affair.

He did know, of course, damn well, that Joe could not participate in any of the profits derived from a contract like that without being under the gravest imputation of bad faith; and he also suspected that John knew he hadn't any money to spare. The smugness of this gesture of fair play enraged him, and he cursed the banker steadily for half an hour. Then he went out to find Gordon Snell, the man whom New York insisted upon overwhelming with easy money.

Snell wasn't the sort of New Yorker who goes out of town for week-ends. Saturday night was for him the highest and most brilliantly illuminated spot in the week. Joe found him, in his office, somewhat less expansive than he had been over the lunch table; and when he had learned the import of his visitor's call, distinctly patronizing. However, he was cordial enough, and professed himself willing to hear Joe's story—only not to-day. Not until next week some time. Ah, Monday would be all right—Monday or Tuesday. Joe had better call him up on Monday. Not too early, though. A man could never tell down here in New York where he was going to be or what sort of head he would have Monday morning.

Right now, he had to run off—had a date for lunch. He had another date for to-night, too, but this wasn't so strictly private an affair. He would like to have Joe come along. Yes, by Heck, Joe had got to come along! No two ways about it. It was going to be a nice little party. They'd have dinner together at the Astor, and look in at one of the shows to pass the time until the party proper was supposed to begin. Up in one of the big new studio buildings in the west Fifties, it was to be. Only no business. Joe had got to give his solemn word for that. Business, Snell's experience had taught him, was one thing, and pleasure was another; and a man couldn't enjoy getting gently illuminated if there was any danger of his being asked to sign on the dotted line somewhere.

Joe knew this sort of lack-wit well enough to perceive that these convivial preliminaries were indispensable, and it put him for a moment in a dilemma. Then he said, "I can't get drunk any more, myself. Had to go on the wagon. But I'm good for the dinner and the show, anyhow; and I won't talk business."

He was fairly dragged along to the party, too, afterward, and had of course an agonizing experience—only just short of unbearable. The rest of the crowd were getting drunk as fast as they knew how. It was an ironic reflection that once, and not very long ago, this sort of entertainment had been a favorite recreation of his own. He endured it by main strength until about two o'clock Sunday morning; then, reflecting that Snell would never be able to remember afterward whether he had left now or hours later, he bade an unobtrusive good night to his host and slipped away.

He was nearer discouraged than he had been before. It did not seem likely that a drunken fool like this could be a source of efficacious help—and yet he knew of no other. Well, there was no good thinking any more about Snell till Monday morning.

When he went to the desk in his hotel to get his key, they handed him a telegram. He supposed it was information from Jennie that he'd wired for as to the amount of the drafts that had come in against bills of lading on flax that had already been shipped. He had hardly the heart to open it.

But the woman's name which was signed to it was not Jennie's. It read:—

"Arriving Pennsylvania station tomorrow morning nine forty-five for few hours only.

Violet."

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He was still incredulous when he saw her walking toward him, down the platform. Frightened, and thrilled at the same time, with a sense of great adventure, as he could see she was, she had once more the look of a schoolgirl to him.

Not merely that; she looked to his enraptured, sleepless eyes like a probationary angel come down to change the whole face of the world.

Her face brightened joyously when she saw him, then in an instant composed itself into the look of amicably indifferent recognition appropriate to being met in the station by a man whom her husband might have requested to look after his wife.

He took her dressing-case from the red-cap, tipped the boy, and said to her, "You've just about got time to make the other train. We'll go around this way."

With a demure gleam of mischief which made him want to kiss her where she stood, she accepted this, contentedly, as a maneuver for getting away at once, out of the Chicago crowd that was pouring along the platform.

"I don't care where we go," she said, after they had changed levels and were walking down a transverse corridor, "only I must be back here in the station at six o'clock. That's when I am supposed to be getting in from Chicago."

"That'll be all right," he assured her. "I'll get you back here on time. You can leave it all to me." For an instant the sense of the furtiveness of their escapade elated him. He gave a short laugh, slid his arm inside hers, and pressed it against his body. She returned the pressure, but at once, with a nervous glance around, released herself.

"If we're going where we can really be alone for a while," she said, "there's no good taking chances here."

His mood changed. "Oh, damn it!" he said. "Yes, I suppose you're right." And they walked on in silence.

She hesitated a moment in clear surprise when she found him showing a pair of tickets and taking her through the gate to one of the Long Island railway trains, but she asked no explanation, and he made none until they were seated in an almost empty coach.

"This is a little branch line," he said. "It goes down to one of the beaches where there's nobody about, this time of year. I found it when I was wandering around, just

a week ago to-day. Had it all to myself, including a little hotel that a fat man is keeping open because he hasn't anywhere else to go. We can get lunch there, I guess.—It was only last Sunday I was there," he added, "but it seems like the longest year I've ever lived."

She had stripped off one of her gloves, and nestled her bare hand into his, upon the seat between them. At this confession, though she misunderstood it, she darted a glance around, and perceived that there was no one else in their part of the car—not even a brakeman—she raised his hand and stroked the hairy back of it with her lips. "Poor old Joe!" she whispered.

He had a blissful hour before they left the train at the little way-station he had picked out, despite the rattle of the windows, the slamming of the doors, the sudden stops and starts, and the bawling of the brakeman, which kept beating a dreadful tattoo upon his drawn nerves. It would be too hard to talk, she said, and sitting quietly beside him like this, and continuing to hold his hand, she gave him a respite from the thoughts that had been surging through his brain, turning him giddy, elating him and terrifying him ever since he'd read that telegram.

She was looking around pretty dubiously, he saw, at the surroundings they descended into from the train.

"It's awfully bright, isn't it?" she said. "I hate a glare like this, especially when I've just spent the night on the train."

"All the light in the world couldn't hurt your looks," he told her. But she turned away from him with a petulant laugh.

"Where are we going?" she asked. "We've got to find some shade somewhere."

"I don't believe there's any on the beach," he said. It had been his idea that they would sit there side by side, with nothing but the Atlantic Ocean and a peppering of Antilles between them and South America. "There's a veranda on the hotel over there, though," he added.

She cast another dubious glance at the shabby little

gable-roofed building his gesture had pointed out, and for a moment stood still, visibly casting about for an alternative. Then she started on, he following, along the rickety sidewalk that led to the inn. There were drifts of loose sand across the sidewalk, and over these she walked gingerly.

"I hate sand, too," she told him, but not unamiably, "when I've got on shoes and stockings like these."

"I'm afraid there's nothing much here but sand," he remarked, apologetically. Just before they reached the inn, she stopped and faced him. "Joe," she asked, "why did you bring me here?"

He was taken aback for an answer; couldn't be sure he knew what she meant. "Why," he said, "I was trying to think of some quiet open sort of place where we could talk and decide what we were going to do, and this came into my head. I'm sorry you don't like it."

"It's all right," she asserted, "only it looks so perfectly disreputable."

"I don't think it's that," Joe said, "but it does look as if it was closed. There used to be some chairs and things standing around on this veranda." He tried the door and found it locked, but after rattling and knocking upon it for a while, they heard heavy steps within, and presently the fat proprietor came and opened it. He was in his shirt, but the garment was clean and he was freshly shaven.

"Can we get lunch here?" Joe asked. "There are just the two of us."

"Why, the hotel is rightly closed," the man said, "but I guess I can cook you up a lunch if you don't mind taking sort of what you can get."

"Not a bit," Violet assured him cordially, somewhat to Joe's surprise. "It's very nice of you to take so much trouble for us."

Upon that, he hospitably invited them in and told them to make themselves right at home. The interior made a strong contrast with the outside look of the place. It was unpretentiously but agreeably furnished, and it was

immaculately neat. There was a wide fireplace flanked with settles, where he said they could have a fire whenever they wanted it. He'd have lunch ready about one, if that would suit them. He took a childlike pleasure in Violet's approval of the place, which she warmly expressed. His daughter had fixed it up, he said, and she was the one who really ran it during the season. Now, however, she was working in New York, and her hours made it inconvenient for her to commute down here. He was just staying around to sort of keep the place from blowing away. "And with my build," he concluded humorously, "I'm pretty good for that."

Willingly, he set about to refurnish the veranda, carrying out, with Joe's help, a small rattan davenport, two or three chairs, cushions, and striped cotton blankets, gay colored. "Just as easy to make it a bit home-like," he explained, when Violet had protested that these latter additions were superfluous.

"It's perfect, Joe," Violet said, when at last they were ensconced and their host, with visible reluctance, had left them to themselves. "And that fat old innocent," she added, "is the nicest thing about it. No, not nicer than you. The nicest thing about the *place*, I said. I suppose he thinks we're a couple of honeymooners."

He leaned against the rail, devouring her with burning eyes. She had tucked herself up in a corner of the davenport, taken off her hat, and dropped it, negligently, on the floor beside her. The sense of the incredible perfection of her, in form and texture, in the exquisite fineness of detail, oppressed his heart with a strange melancholy, and stiffened his throat.

"You look the part," he said.

"You don't," she retorted, returning his gaze. "You look horribly tired—and ill. Oh, don't sit away off there. Come here where I can feel you. Wait, though. It's horrid to have to do it, but look up the train first, Joe. See how long we're going to have. I've absolutely got to be back in the Pennsylvania station a little before six."

He consulted a time card that he had in his pocket. "That means leaving at four fifteen, to be sure of it."

Her eyes filled up with tears. "And it's nearly noon now," she cried. "Four hours—and I thought it was a whole day."

"Well, never mind. We won't waste any of it."

He had dropped down on the sofa beside her, but she wasn't content with the way he sat. "You're so tired," she protested. "So deadly tired. Can't you just be happy, and relax for a little while? Lean down on me, like this. No, you're not too heavy—not half as heavy as I thought you'd be.—Joe, is it all my fault you're like this?"

"It's not your fault at all," he told her. "And it isn't all your doing either. I've had a hell of a two weeks—and there are more of them in sight. But I'm through the worst of it, I guess. I'll come out right side up in the end, anyhow. It isn't the first fight I've had, by a good many."

She said dryly, "I'd like to see John got the better of for once. Don't you let him beat you, Joe. I'd always think it was my fault."

"John Williamson?" he asked slowly. "Don't worry about him. He hasn't got me yet."

She wanted to know, over a little laugh, what John he thought she meant. "I believe you're going to sleep," she added. "You're so tired. Don't try to talk. Keep still, like this. Isn't it ridiculous? I'm the one that's supposed to be sick. I'm packed off to Doctor Brown. He's got a place out here on Long Island for nervous wrecks, where he treats good-for-nothing women like me. A mixture of Freud and Christian Science he gives us. It works pretty well, too. I've been to him once or twice for insomnia.—Well, I had it all right after I got that letter of yours, Joe."

Despite her effort to hold him where he was, he sat erect. "You must have hated me for that," he said.

"Silly, I adored you for it—but it frightened me out of my five wits. It was wild to take a chance like that,

Joe. John doesn't read my letters, and he doesn't ask questions, but if he had been there when the mail came in and had seen the thickness of that envelope, and your handwriting on it, he'd have had a whole lot to think about. That's just the kind of chances we can't take. But I'm glad you did it once. I never knew what it was before. I felt as if I had to go to you then, without waiting a minute. And of course it got worse during the week, as I found out what John and the others were doing to you. Oh, they didn't tell me anything, but I caught bits of their talk now and then. I was afraid if John tried to talk to me about it, I'd blow up and give everything away; so I didn't dare talk to him at all. Locked myself up, and had a nervous breakdown. It seemed pretty real at the time—even to me. But I was all right again as soon as he suggested Doctor Brown. I had to be, or he would have insisted on sending somebody down with me. He suggested Margaret Craven, as it was. I promised to stay with Alice Wentworth instead of going to a hotel, and I told him I'd telegraph her what train to meet me at. I did—but it wasn't the one I was on. And that's how I got our day.—It isn't much, is it, for all that? Four hours—and already they're slipping away."

"They're enough, though, if we don't waste them.—No, you've got me about half hypnotized now. I haven't any grip on my mind when you hold me like that. We've got to talk this thing through somehow; find out where we are, and what we're going to do."

She drew a long sigh. "What's the use spoiling this, Joe? That's all we should do, trying to talk. It'll be time enough on the train, when we go back, won't it? After all, there can't be very much to say. It's so heavenly still here. Put your head down, where you can see the clouds that make those big purple shadows.—Do you know what I wish? I wish Mount Vesuvius was right behind us, here; and after we'd been here a long time—as long as we wanted, it would all at once smother us with ashes, the way it did those Pompeian people."

He had yielded to her arms again. "If that's what we wanted," he said, "we shouldn't have to depend on Mount Vesuvius. It can be managed more handily than that. But it'll be a long while before I'm ready to die, even like this. There's too much left to be lived through. I'd like to sail into the Bay of Naples with you, for one thing, and have a look at that old volcano.—Do you remember something you said the first time we talked together, about wishing you could be there with me when I had my first look at all that? It's going to work out, sometime, you know. I've known it, in a way, ever since you said it.—We *could* do it, at that. To-morrow. There's a Dutch boat sailing for Lisbon.—Oh, it's all right to laugh, but it's going to happen some day."

"There isn't a city in Europe, Joe,"—her voice was somber enough now—"where we wouldn't be running into people all the time who knew me. And who'd know what I'd done. Oh, it's a lovely dream, my dear, but it will never come true."

Again, and this time bruskly, he disengaged himself from her arm. He rose giddily to his feet, pulled up a chair, and sat down on it. "You see," he said, "we can't get away from it. It keeps coming back. We've got to talk it out; decide what we're going to do."

"I don't *want* to talk!" she said fiercely, at the end of a tight drawn silence. "Talking won't get us anywhere."

"I guess you're right about that," he agreed. "That's the way I feel about it, too. It's always simplest to do a thing first and save your talking till afterward. This is what we'll do, Violet. There's a Chilean liner sailing for Valparaiso, Saturday. That'll give us time to get our passports and anything we need. They know me down there, and they'll take you for granted as my wife without a question. There's nobody who'd think of asking a question. We'd leave all this clean behind. Start fresh, both of us, on a life that is worth living. Something we've never had a chance at. I've never had a wife—I haven't even a legal one, now—and you've never had a

husband, either. That's God's truth. You know it, yourself; found it out at last. He'd divorce you if you asked him to, and then we could make it all square—go anywhere we liked—tell anybody to go to hell. And in the meantime . . . It's better than mucking around here in this. There won't be anything hard about it, either. Not after you've once said you'll do it. And you will. It's written down in the books that you will!"

"That's a crazier dream than the other, Joe," she said uneasily. "I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

"There's not a thing in it," he contradicted her, "that isn't plain common sense;" and he went on for a while to enlarge upon the practicality of it. He had a thousand dollars in his pocket, and ten thousand more which was almost as accessible. He'd been keeping it handy for years, on the off chance of some emergency that would call for it. That would be enough to give him a start, and a start was all he ever wanted, anywhere. Down in that part of the world opportunities for a man of his profession were thick as dandelions. They went to seed faster than you could pick them. "I'd never ask you to take a chance with hardship," he assured her earnestly. "I can keep you as safe from the—meannesses of life as John Williamson can."

Her uncontrollable restlessness as he talked, her frantic attempts to turn him aside from the theme, served only to feed his elation. It was against herself she was struggling, not against him. He abandoned practical considerations as something established, and began painting for her the romance of the picture, the paradisaical country, the suavity and the charm of life and manners.

For that hour he was fully himself again. The lassitude was conquered, the tortured nerves in tune, the gnawing, obsessing need of alcohol forgotten. He revealed the thing he wanted her to see, not in tame descriptive generalities, but in flashes of concrete reality, fragments of his own experience, illuminative sparks of the most minute detail. He fairly gave her the wine-dry air of that mountain-guarded country to breathe.

It was she now who resisted his arms, but he won her to them at last and stilled her protests in them; quieted her trembling.

"After all," he said, when he had kissed her—for the first time, that day, "this is what matters." His voice, harsh as it was with passion, subdued itself to the ear that was so near his lips. "You're in love with me. You've found out what it means at last. You can guess what it will be like. I'm in love with you. And I *know* what it will mean. I'm not a green boy, guessing—nor an ox who has forgotten. You can't go back now, Violet!"

She did not return his kiss, but she lay unresisting, acquiescent, in his embrace. She may have thought, during these wild, heedless minutes, that she would go with him. He sensed victory in the air, at least. But when they heard the inn-keeper coming heavily toward the door to tell them their lunch was ready, she struggled erect like one startled out of a dream.

Before their host, while he was waiting upon them, she amazed Joe—though it was a faculty of hers he had often wondered at before—by the perfection with which she played her part. She ate her lunch with an appearance of normal appetite, where he could hardly choke down a mouthful. She talked amusedly, where he could hardly find monosyllables to respond, about small items in their common experience, about people they knew. Despite the fact that Joe was powerless to help, she carried him along with her, so that they presented to the fat old inn-keeper a thoroughly plausible picture of a pair of Chicagoans, not too recently married, enjoying a vacation in New York, and a Sunday in the country.

The only indication she gave to Joe of anything behind all this was by deliberately delaying the old man. She was trying, Joe thought, to prolong her respite. But when at last he did leave them, with a bell to ring when they should be ready for their final course, she turned straight back to their own affair and in an even voice tore his hopes to pieces.

"It's no good, Joe," she said. "It will never happen—that thing you've been talking about. I know you had spoken about it before—about the time coming when I'd be ready to go away with you.—Break my own life altogether, and try to hold on by yours. I've let myself dream sometimes that I would, but it's never been anything but a dream—never can be. I suppose if I had any real courage—but I haven't, Joe; not a scrap."

He contradicted her roughly, trying to put a conviction behind the words that was not there. It was her tone that told him the truth, not the things she had been saying.

"Why," she reminded him, with a wry smile, "I've never even had the sand to tell John that you hadn't—taken advantage of me in the car that day—not so that he'd have to believe it. I'm fond of John, too," she added. "I wouldn't hurt him like that for anything in the world."

He laughed, and then was amazed to see that tears had sprung into her eyes. "I didn't mean to hurt you," he said apologetically, "only it seems to me that in twenty years he has had his chance."

"I know," she conceded. "I am in love with you, and I'm not with him—never was, I guess. All the same, love isn't the only thing in the world—not for me." Her voice ran thin, betraying an almost hysterical note. "Why, down in that country—Valparaiso, wherever it is—those people would all be foreigners, talking a language I don't know a word of. I wouldn't have anybody but you. I want people around that like me. Joe, it isn't thinkable; that's all. It's simply frantic to talk about asking John to divorce me. John! Then there's Dorothy, too.—I didn't want you to talk about it. I knew you'd spoil this one little day of ours if you did."

"What did you want this day for?" Joe asked.

She dried her eyes, and echoed his words with a stare and a slow burning blush.

"I wanted to see you," she stammered. "I knew you were unhappy, and I was miserable, and I thought . . ." She broke off there, and after a moment's silence finished

with a flash of anger, "There's something beastly about you sometimes, Joe."

"I guess that's true of most of us," he said dully, "but I didn't mean to be beastly then."

Her response to his humility was another lightning change of mood. Her hand darted out across the table and rested upon his. "I'm sorry, Joe," she said. "I wish we could be a *little* happy." Then she rang the bell. "We may as well have the rest of our lunch, anyhow," she added.

She told their old host, gaily, how good it had been; and he, basking in her favor, made an endless business of setting out the new course. "I could give you better meals than this," he said, "if I knew you were going to be here. If you was to come down here, now, and stay two or three days, I could make you right comfortable. I should think you might like that, too, if you care to have things quiet and simple like."

Joe said, easily enough, at the end of not more than three seconds of silence, "Well, we'll have to talk about that. We've got to go back to New York to-night, of course, but we'll let you know before we go."

Down in the buried recesses of his spirit there had been a shattering burst of laughter at himself for a romantic, unbelievable fool. It was that caressing touch of Violet's hand, followed by her ringing of the bell, that seemed somehow to have brought down the whole house of cards. It had happened before the inn-keeper had made his happy suggestion that they come and live here a few days, or he would have been surprised by the momentary gleam in Violet's face with which she responded to it. He had looked for it in her face, knowing it would be there. God, what a fool he had been, with his chivalry and his precious ideals! Well, they understood each other, now!

They finished their lunch in silence, after their host had withdrawn once more, and then, still without a word, returned to the veranda. When she had seated herself upon the davenport, he sat beside her, but not very close, and

with his hands clasped between his knees. She asked him what time it was and he told her, quarter to three.

"Just a little more than an hour left," she commented forlornly. "Will that be long enough, do you suppose, for you to forgive me in? I don't think I can bear it if you don't."

"There's nothing to forgive," he said. "You're perfectly right about it—about the craziness of my plan, I mean. I've been a fool. And I've times of being what you call a beast."

"I *don't* call you that!—Except when I'm so frightened I don't know what I'm saying. Of myself, Joe, more than of you. I'm the worst coward in the world, that's the truth about me. But I wish I didn't make you so unhappy."

"You don't need to worry about that," he said. "You've been a lot kinder to me than I deserve."

"But I'm unhappy, too," she sobbed. "Oh, I wish I knew what to do!"

He pulled her up, then, in his arms and kissed her, and she, with a deep drawn sigh returned the kiss. "We've still got an hour," he said, and for a long while after that they spoke of nothing more to the purpose than the sailing gulls and the sheets of silver left by the receding tide.

She asked him, though, at the end of a protracted silence, what he was thinking about.

"I've been trying not to think about it," he confessed. "But I am a beast, and I can't get it out of my head."

She neither spoke nor stirred until he went on.

"It isn't as if we'd tried to plan it out, you see. But there it is. That simple old chap takes us for granted, absolutely. We could have those two or three days . . . If you telephoned your doctor that you weren't coming till Wednesday . . . I don't suppose he'd see anything funny in that, would he?—Unless your friend in New York should take it into her head to run over and pay you a visit; or try to telephone . . ."

"Doctor Brown won't let any one see his patients; not

till after the first three or four days, anyhow, when he's had a chance to see how bad they are. Nor telephone them, either." She said it simply, like a child, and despite himself, a feeling deeper than mere sensual excitement caught him by the throat.

"Well, then," he went on raggedly, "there's nothing that could happen. All you'd have to do to-morrow would be to keep your Mrs. Wentworth from actually putting you on the train. You come down to the same station, but you take our little train, instead. And I'm on it. And we come out here and have our little—holiday. Two days, out of a life-time.—Oh, I know it's impossible. But you asked what I was thinking about, and that was it."

"Do you want me to do it, Joe?"

The simplicity of the question, and the intensity of the emotion that propelled it, literally, for an instant, stopped the beat of his heart. His eyes filled with tears, but through the blur he could see hers, wide with a sense of great adventure, gazing up at him.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know whether I want you to or not."

Her arms tightened about him and she uttered a shaky laugh. "I love you for saying that. I'll come, Joe. I won't welsh altogether. I'll give you those two days.—We've got to be starting back now. You go find the man and tell him. He'd better not see me like this."

Joe made his arrangements and they caught the train and contrived, very tidily, how her meeting with Alice Wentworth at six should be made plausible. It was not till hours after he had left her that a deeply submerged cavern in him caught the gleam of an avenging grin at John Williamson.

15

Violet managed her meeting with Alice Wentworth with entire success. The reason why Alice hadn't actually seen her coming out through the gate was sufficiently suggested by a casual half-sentence and a gesture, and was never thought of again.

Alice made her jump, though, by saying,—holding her off in both hands for a good look, “You’ve been deceiving John, Violet. I don’t believe in your Doctor Brown for one minute. A nice-looking nervous wreck you are! What did you come on for, really?”

A moment later, as she saw her friendly bit of badinage had not prospered, she explained, “I was only trying to say, Vi, that I’d never seen you looking prettier. Or any younger, hardly, since I was your bridesmaid. And since I’d been wondering whether I oughtn’t get a wheel-chair for you, it was such a relief I tried to be funny.—I ought to have known better at my age, but I didn’t,” she concluded, in obvious chagrin. “Violet, if you give another thought to that silly joke, I shall weep right here in public.—Come along. It’s miles to the car. Have your red-cap give your bag to Wrenn; and give him your trunk checks, too.”

“My trunks!” Violet caught her breath. The disposal of them did not offer, it was likely, any insoluble problem, but she hadn’t thought of it before, nor, apparently, had Joe, and the omission rattled her. How many more sunken reefs of this sort might there be?

“You poor dear!” Alice cried. “What does it matter whether you send them up or leave them here? You said in your wire you might stay with us a day or two; that’s all. But if you want to go straight on to-morrow, it’s perfectly easy.” She possessed herself, by good-humored violence, of the checks and handed them over to the grave kindly-looking servant. “Now we’re all right, at last,” she said encouragingly, and Violet had to suppress an hysterical desire to laugh wildly. Anyhow, Alice was no longer skeptical about her need of going to Doctor Brown’s!

Save for panicky flashes of elation and terror, about equally combined, when she thought of to-morrow’s adventure, she was near enough her natural self by the time the drive to the big brown house in the East Eighties was accomplished. Of course she’d come down to dinner, and she’d love a rubber or two of bridge afterward. There

was nothing the matter with her, really, except that she couldn't sleep.

"I guess you'd better telephone John if you feel equal to it," Alice said, when she'd come up with her to her room. "He seems to be rather jumpy about you. At least he sounded that way to me this afternoon when he telephoned."

"What was he telephoning to you about?" Violet heard herself ask, in a voice that sounded natural enough only rather far away. She didn't as yet quite see why she should be frightened, but she was, horribly.

"Lie down a minute," Alice commanded quietly, after a look at her. "It's all right. There hasn't anything happened. He tried to telephone to you, that was all, and when they told him you weren't here, he asked for me. He seemed to have the idea that you'd get here this morning, and couldn't quite get it through his head when I told him we weren't expecting you till six. That's why it struck me he was having nerves about you."

"Did he tell you why he—wanted to talk to me?" Violet was a long time getting the words out, and she didn't know whether they were audible or not.

"Why it wasn't anything that mattered," Alice told her. "Something, I believe, that your cousin, Margaret Craven, had meant to ask you about before you went away; somebody's address, or such a matter. She was having lunch with him and he said he'd telephone and find out for her. It's absolutely nothing to bother about, you see."

There was a long silence. Finally Violet said, "I see what happened. John thought I was coming on the Broadway. I was, but I missed it. And he always laughs at me for missing trains, so I didn't call him up and tell him.—I suppose I ought to telephone him now . . ."

"My dear," said Alice, "you can't talk across the room to me, let alone to Chicago. I'll wire John that you've got here all right—or telephone, if you'd rather."

"No. Wire is better," Violet murmured.

Despite their protests, she did come down to dinner and played bridge furiously all the evening. It was her last night out, she told them, and the only thing in the world she dreaded was going to bed. Doctor Brown could make her do it, but nobody else could. And, indeed, when she knocked on Alice's door, about five in the morning, she was not undressed beyond a negligee, nor had she lain in her bed.

She was beaten, by them. The night had been too much for her. She had kept up the fight—Joe's fight, she put it—as long as she could. Her terrors had abated her desire for him, and even made her believe at moments that she whole-heartedly hated him, but they did not rid her of him. She trembled at the thought of his rage if she were to fail to meet their rendezvous. What would he do? What *mightn't* he do—a man like that! She told herself she wouldn't be safe from him for years—never—if she disappointed him that morning.

But, even so, she was less afraid of him than she was of Margaret Craven. Margaret had never liked her much, and had for years been distinctly romantic about John. She took John's part in their small quarrels and lectured her by implication about her duties to him. John spoiled her—was forever doing things for her. Whenever, in Violet's absence, he needed a hostess, he called her in. Lunching with him, to-day! of course she was!

It had never, though, until now occurred to her to regard Margaret seriously. In the matter of Joe Greer, she had from the beginning taken Margaret's enmity light-heartedly enough. She had written to Joe back in August, "Margaret looks at me as if she would like to slay me, and I don't mind a bit." Up to now she had considered herself impregnable. That was the amount of it.

But to-night her vision of that lunch,—Margaret talking about her with pretended affection and concern, egg-ing John on to telephone to her,—awakened a horrifying surmise. Violet had been careless about Joe before Margaret, last summer. She had talked about him unnecessarily. Margaret might have guessed a good deal.

And then, there was Henry. Henry more than guessed; he knew. He wouldn't have betrayed her wilfully, but he was helpless in Margaret's hands. If he let her get hold of an end of a thread to work on, she'd have unraveled pretty much the whole thing.

Mightn't she, then, have suspected this New York trip from the first? And wasn't that why she had made John telephone? Well, the trick had worked. The alibi was exploded. (What a fool Alice had been to give her away like that!) Violet could see John's face, perplexed but still unsuspicious—John was a dear, that way—as he came back to Margaret from the telephone. "It's a funny thing," he would have said. "They aren't expecting her until the six o'clock train to-night."

How would Margaret have played that hand? Would she have laid down her cards? "Poor old John, don't you know who it was she went to New York to see?" Or had she been subtler than that? Whipped up his alarm over Violet's safety? Aphasia or amnesia—or whatever they call it that people disappear with. Had she already started him to New York to find her?

It would work out to a handsome revenge for Margaret if she had persuaded him to do that.—But was revenge what Margaret wanted? Or was it Violet's own place—her secure place with John, long coveted, that she thought she saw a chance to get?

It was when her thoughts reached this destination that she knocked on Alice Wentworth's door. One of her random reflections during the night had been that Alice, if she had ever looked at the sending point of her telegram, must have perceived that she had lied about the trains. But this was the merest incidental. She had no fear left for anybody—after Joe and Margaret had taken their respective shares. She told Alice, in a manner of the most intense calm, that she must go back to Chicago at once—on the very next train that left. She didn't care what road—only not on the Pennsylvania.

She gave John, who met her in the LaSalle Street station

at seven o'clock the next morning, the most electrifying surprise he had experienced since she had told him, twenty years before, that she would marry him. The sort of hug and kiss she bestowed upon him on the platform was unusual enough, but nothing to what followed. She made light of her illness, as they walked through the station to the car in which he'd driven down from Lake Forest to meet her. She'd had a silly attack of the flutters, had got over it, and had come home as quickly as she could to reassure him that she was all right. He'd have found this rather hard to believe had not her looks completely borne her out.

After they were seated in the car, with the chauffeur waiting to be told where they wanted to go, he asked her—jocularly, so that it would be easy for her to refuse—if she'd like to have breakfast at the club with him before she drove home.

"Can't you come home to breakfast with me, John?" she asked. "Just for the ride and the visit?" And behind Jeffrey's statuesque back, as they rolled up Sheridan Road, she sat close to him and held his hand!

Three or four miles from home he told her he had Margaret out there to look after her and stave things off that she mightn't want to bother with.

"That's all right if she doesn't stave *you* off," Violet said, with a small nervous laugh.

"As long as she's there," she went on a moment later, "I think I'll tell you something now. Because she makes it hard, somehow—this is what I meant just now—for me to talk to you. Well, that's all it is, really. I don't want you—staved off, John, by anybody. I don't want to be—let alone. To go my own ways. That sort of thing. I know I've made you think I did. That's a trick most women have, I guess. But they don't mean it. At least I don't.—Not any more. I'd like to have you with me—all the time. Day and night."

He looked at her gravely; almost—if that had been possible for John—suspiciously. "Violet," he asked, "have

you been frightened by anything? Or anybody? Are you afraid of anything, now?"

She met his look steadily. "There isn't a thing. There's only one thing. And that is that some day you may get tired of me." At the look this drew from him she uttered a sobbing laugh and flung herself upon him. "It isn't a nightwatchman I want you for," she said.

16

From the ninth of October, when Joe telegraphed Jennie for information on the totals of the drafts that were coming in, his office heard no word of him until within a week of the expiration of Williamson's offer. It was an anxious time for Jennie, saved from being desperate only by a continual asseveration of her faith that Joe would turn up in time, bringing some sort of means of salvation with him.

But on Tuesday, the second of November—election day, that was—just as she was getting ready to leave the office at the end of the afternoon, a boy from the Stratford Hotel brought her a note written in lead pencil, in a hand so little like Joe's that momentarily she doubted the signature. It asked her simply to come up and see him as soon as she could, telling her the number of the room he was in. He had scribbled the words, "It's all right," after signing, but this she took as referring merely to the propriety of her visit.

With a heart-sickening premonition that everything that mattered had utterly gone wrong, she went along with the bellboy to the hotel and had him show her up to Joe's room.

He called in answer to her knock, "Come in, Jennie, if that's you."

It was then nearly six o'clock, fully dark long since, out-of-doors, yet his room was unlighted save by a small night lamp upon the bed-stand. Joe, all alone, was sitting in an easy chair that had been drawn up to one of the windows, a rug across his knees. He looked round at

her and nodded toward another chair that shared the embrasure, but made no other move.

"And they call this an election night!" he said, looking out over the boulevard—and away from her. "Why, in the town I grew up in, they could get up more excitement than this over a dog fight!"

It was all she could do not to weep. It did not seem possible that the six weeks since she had last seen him, in Fargo, could have made such devastating changes in the man she knew. He was shrunken, chilly—huddled under his rug; the hand he finally offered her was slack and his voice spiritless, despite the pitiable effort he made at his familiar manner. She stood speechless, holding the limp hand he had given her in both her own.

"Oh, hell, let's get it over with!" he exclaimed at last. "Sit down. You want to know what's happened, I suppose. I'm licked—that's the short of it."

"You're sick," she retorted. "That's the main trouble."

"See that in the dark, can you?" he asked, with a drawn grin. "Well, you're wrong. What you see is only a by-product of the damnedest big drunk I ever had, I guess it must have been. I wasn't there, except at the start, till after it was all over, but that's my best judgment on it."

In this mocking tormenting humor he was perfectly intractable, she knew. All you could do was to follow along, keeping back the tears as well as you could, till he changed.

"Celebrating something, were you?" she asked.

"You might say I was, in a way. It wasn't over having sold our flax, though, nor borrowed the money to pay for it. Not a pound nor a dollar. But celebration isn't a bad word for it, at that."

"They've really beaten us, then, have they, Joe?"

Even then she half expected his great laugh and a command to look in some drawer or pocket for the evidence of his triumph. It didn't come. There was a long-stretched silence instead.

"It wasn't they that beat me," he said at last. "They couldn't have done it. It was the other thing.—I guess you know that, don't you? Didn't you see anything queer when you came up to Fargo, in September? Not about them; about me?"

She nodded. "Whisky, you mean?"

"I give you my word I didn't know it then, Jennie. I thought I was all right. I knew I needed an ungodly amount of it, and I didn't want a lot of meddlers buzzing about it, so I kept it dark. I honestly thought there was no more harm in it, for me, than there was in my mother's milk. I'd happened to find out that it did stop that damned headache of mine, if I drank enough of it, and so far as I could see that was all it did. Damned fool of course. I must have been doped with it, for weeks up there, not to have seen what Williamson's crowd was doing. I didn't find out what was the matter with me until the night you telephoned—and hung up on me."

"And of course, you couldn't quit then," she commented; "right in the middle of everything."

"I did though. I stopped dead. Didn't have a single drop of whisky or any other sort of hootch all that week. It was funny about that. My body was crazy, but my mind must have been damned near right. I all but landed that Carberry bunch. I could feel 'em coming right along. But they must have had a talk with their bankers, because on Friday afternoon they began to blow cold. I dropped them right there and went to Snell. He took me to a late studio party Saturday night, and I didn't even take a drink then. Left him with a date—for Tuesday, I think it was.—Or it may have been Monday.—The same day. I guess that was it. Along in the afternoon."

She was puzzled by the phrase "the same day" but nothing would have induced her to ask him what he meant. She could see his eyes glowing in the dusk of the room. In the silence between them she heard, coming up faintly from the boulevard, a few hoarse shouts and the bleat of horns. She saw the horizontal sweep of the beam of a

searchlight, and some area of her mind recalled the fact that this meant Harding's election to the presidency of the United States. How could they know so soon? And what did it matter?

"I had a funny week-end, Jennie," Joe went on, at last. "Damned funny. I'm glad I didn't murder anybody. I'd run amuck, no doubt of that. Part of me had. But part of me must have been all right; clearer than ever that I had to get that money from Snell. I kept my appointment with him on the dot.

"The queer thing was, I didn't want a drink. I remember it struck me I was cured of that, anyhow. What I couldn't stand about Snell was that he was so slow. His body as well as his wits. He couldn't seem even to put his hands where he wanted them to go without fumbling. And his brains seemed made of leather. I thought I'd go crazy waiting for him to catch up. I didn't let him see that, though. I was making a pretty good start with him; getting him warm. Of course I didn't know, except from his say-so, that he had any real money—enough to do me any good—but I was going to get him anyway.

"I don't know where the bottle of hootch came from. I suppose he got it out of his desk. I'd forgotten all about it. Forgotten I wasn't drinking, see? I guess I poured out that first little drink without noticing—just as you'd light a cigarette. Drank it the same way. And then I remember the queer look there was in his face when he watched me pour out my first real drink.

"I can't remember much beyond that, except in bits. I think we kept on talking business for a while. And then we went to places. Different places. I don't know when he left me—that night or later. I remember talking to a girl, a serious poor devil of a girl, with a scar on her upper lip, for hours. Quite a talk, that was, I'll bet. Would have made a good added book for the Old Testament. And then sometime later that week, or it may have been the next Sunday—it seemed like Sunday—I found I was pretty sick, and seeing things, so I took myself in a

taxis up to Bellevue Hospital. I don't believe I'd have come to that if I hadn't quit for a week. However, there it was. They kept me there till yesterday. Then I had 'em telegraph Bennett and send me out here. Got in this afternoon about three o'clock. I had to get here to fix things up with you, and I wasn't sure when our option on Williamson's offer ran out. There's still a day or two, isn't there?"

She nodded, a little absently. "Yes, that's all right. We have till Friday." She sat for a while very still, weeping quietly and trusting to the dark that he shouldn't see. Then she reached for both his hands and held them in a tight clutch.

"If there's anything, Joe—anything in the world, that I can do—to help you, tell me, and I'll do it."

"Why, there's quite a lot," he said, rather flatly.

At his tone she snatched her hands away and caught back a sob. In a moment, though, in a cheerful—almost secretarial—voice she managed to say, "All right. Tell me everything you can think of. I don't believe I'll forget anything." He did not begin, however; sat a long while in what she took to be meditation. Finally he gave a weak, distressful laugh. "I can't seem to remember any of 'em. *Non compos* by streaks, that's what it amounts to. Wait a minute! I've got the gist of it. Nathan's coming round pretty soon with a power of attorney, just as broad as he can draw it, for you. I'll sign it, and then you can act for me in everything, see? Say what you like to Williamson. Make any sort of damn bargain you please. Don't have to bother with details after that."

She was appalled by the prospect of assuming, single-handed, so great a responsibility, and for a while she protested against being saddled with it.

"You said you'd do anything, didn't you?" he reminded her irritably. "Consult any one you like, of course. Only you'll be the boss."

She must have, she insisted, some inkling of what Joe wanted done with Williamson's offer. She couldn't hope

to better it materially. Was she authorized to accept it as it stood?

At this there was a flare of something that looked like the old Joe. "I'd see 'em damned before they got a pound of our flax on those terms. I'd pull the whole thing down. Put the company in bankruptcy. Samson and the pillars, by God! And then I'd start in and design around our old patents and make the process public property. Like the Babcock separator. See how they'd look, then!"

"If we go into bankruptcy," she pointed out to him, "most of the subsidiaries will go too, and then Williamson's crowd will be able to get the flax for practically whatever they choose to pay for it."

The flare died down as suddenly as it had sprung up. Joe heaved a long sigh. "You're right about that, I guess," he said. "You'll just have to do whatever seems best to you. I'm through, Jennie.—For this round anyhow."

She caught eagerly at the hint in that last phrase. It was only his illness that made him feel he was beaten, and it wouldn't last long. All he had to consider was the quickest way of getting well. Doctor Bennett, she supposed, had the cure in charge.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Bennett's got a place in mind where they've got a system for treating my complaint. Going down there with me to-morrow. Turns 'em out as good as new, they say."

There was nothing but a tolerant skepticism in his voice, but Jennie thought she had seen the merest gleam of something else go across his face—a faint reminder of his old boyish grin.

Presently he spoke again. "There's one thing I was forgetting. I want some money. About a hundred and fifty dollars in currency. Bring it around to-morrow morning, early, will you? Bring it yourself and see that I get it."

Evidently it was a relief to him that he'd succeeded in remembering this. This concluded the business and now

he relaxed. He didn't want her to go. He wanted to talk. Let Jennie ring up the dining-room and order herself some dinner. He had his own meals at nursery hours. Nursery meals, too. But these weren't reasons for starving her.

She didn't feel much like eating, but she did as he asked and was rewarded by the pleasure he took in the convivial atmosphere which her tray when it arrived, created. He mocked himself, but not bitterly. "I never thought I'd be asking a lady to dinner with me like this," he observed.

"It's funny how things hang together," he added, after a thoughtful pause. "That gang would never have got the jump on me the way they did if I hadn't been saturated with whisky. And I'd never have got saturated except for my headache. And I wouldn't have had the headache if I hadn't got hit by that automobile. And I suppose, if the chauffeur who drove it hadn't been thinking about his best girl or some such nonsense, he wouldn't have hit me."

The gleam died out of his eyes. She tried desperately to think of something light-hearted to say, but found herself speechless. She knew only too well the connotation he had stumbled upon in those last words about a chauffeur and his best girl.

"You're thinking farther back than that," he went on, in a darker tone. "You're thinking that if I'd taken your advice, another time we had dinner together, about a letter I wanted to write to Pasadena, I wouldn't have been wandering around the streets, seeing red. Well, I give it to you. You were right about that, Jennie."

She gathered up her courage and plunged. "I don't think you'd say that, Joe, if you could see Beatrice as she is now."

"You've been seeing her?" he asked.

"Once in a while. Not often. She came into the office two or three weeks ago, on her way through Chicago."

"Hasn't been coming to you for money, has she? Jennie, by God, if you've given her any . . ."

"She's never asked for any. I'm going to tell you something, Joe. I guess I ought to have done it long ago. She sent back that thousand dollars you gave George when you discharged him. He insisted on it, she said. She sent a check for it in that letter you had me tear up, unopened. But when I told her we'd torn up the letter, she said she'd let that settle it."

He surprised Jennie by laughing at this. "That's like Trix," he remarked. Jennie had plenty more to say now, but decided to wait and let the silence work. After a while he said, "I suppose she's got a baby by now."

"No," she told him. "No signs of one yet."

She was puzzled by the way he took this, and astonished at the question it presently led to. "Jennie," he demanded harshly, "do you believe she ran straight with that fellow—up to the time he married her? She told me she did. Do you suppose it was true?"

"Well, there's certainly no reason for doubting it." But she saw he took this for an evasion—which indeed it was. "Joe," she cried, "what possible difference does it make? She's been married to him now, happily, for almost a year."

"It makes this difference," he insisted; "if she was straight with him, he may stick to her. If she wasn't, he'll leave her. He'll always be suspicious, if she was too free with him, that she will be again, some time, with somebody else."

There was nothing to be gained by arguing a point like this, anyhow. "Trix has developed a lot in this last year," she told him. "I said she was happily married, and I think she is, but even if it doesn't work out any too well, she won't be—smashed by it. She's been studying hard; learning a whole lot of things. She's found a way of earning money, quite a lot of money. It's a funny way but she's as proud of it as can be."

She broke off there, thinking if she waited she could make him ask, but he did not speak. The silence suddenly took on the quality of granite.

She uttered, at last, a forlorn laugh. "Trix won't ask about you, either," she explained. "She *is* like you, Joe. Getting more like you every day.—Oh, it's a crime, that's what it is! When two people adore each other the way you do." She turned on him with an impetuous gesture of appeal. "Joe, she isn't far away. She'll come to you like a—like a bird if you'll just let me send her a ten-word telegram."

His response to this was a veritable snarl of anger, like that of a wounded beast. "None of that, Jennie. Drop it, and drop it quick. Ask her to come and see me like *this!*" He was panicky about it, too; would not be content with less than an unequivocal promise that the girl should be told nothing. When Jennie had given him this, he quieted down again.

"I'll see her again some time," he said. "But it'll be when I'm up; not when I'm down like this. I'll be sitting on the world again some day, Jennie, and then we'll see what Trix has to say. She had her last shot at me when I was flat on my back, and what she did to me was a plenty. Next time it's going to be different."

This brought him round to the old refrain, his defeat by Williamson's crowd and how it had come about. How it would never have come about if he had been in full possession of his faculties. She was hard put to it not to let him see how she flinched from this. He would have seen in a flash, of course, if he'd been the old Joe.

"I've been wondering," he said, "what it was gave 'em the idea of selling out in the first place. I suppose they must have got on, somehow, back in August or so, to the fact that I controlled the majority of the stock, and that made 'em think about getting from under. Well, they know how to keep their faces, that bunch!"

"They'd known it longer than that," she told him. "Since before the April meeting."

"Like hell they had!" he exclaimed, staring at her. "What makes you think so?"

"Oh, Henry made it pretty plain from something he

said the other day." She wished, uneasily, that she hadn't started this, but it was too late to stop now.

"Do you mean Henry himself knew about it then?" he persisted, and she nodded a reluctant assent.

"How about Henry's own stock?" he asked. "Did he sell that out along with the rest?"

"Why, I guess it never was really his. Williamson carried it for him, I suppose. I don't believe he sold it all, or Henry would have resigned from the directorate when the others did. But probably most of it went with the rest.—I don't actually know anything much. He and I don't talk things over, these days."

She perceived, to her great distress, that in giving Joe this piece of information she had somehow dealt him a heavy blow. "Henry Craven," he repeated blankly. "Henry Craven, my God!—Why, Jennie, I'd have sworn I knew everything that went on behind that little man's eye-glasses. And he's known, you say, ever since way back last winter what that bunch was cooking for me? He liked me, too. He liked both of us. And he never cared a damn for them. I know he didn't."

"He's loyal, though," she said. "He's the most scrupulous man I've ever known. His duty was to them, of course."

"Hell, I didn't expect him to *tell* me anything," Joe explained. "I thought I'd see it in his looks."

"He's been looking—ghastly, these last two weeks," she told him, but this fact no longer interested Joe.

"They're a different breed, Jennie," he said at last. "They're a herd. Locking horns and shoving among themselves until an outsider comes along, and then they all face the same way and put down their heads. They know how to wait, too. They're in no hurry. They know a man'll be down, sometime. They don't have to try to trip him. Wait for him, that's all they do. I made good on my process; made thirty million pounds of valuable stuff out of something that had always been thought worthless, but they got me. This time."

Nathan came in about then with the power of attorney, and by the time it had been read and talked over and signed, Doctor Bennett appeared and made no secret of his disapproval of their business with his patient. So Jennie, as soon as it was possible, took her leave.

Joe stopped her on the way to the door with a last reminder. "Don't forget that errand I gave you. And be sure to come back first thing to-morrow morning and tell me about it."

"I won't forget," she promised, but she went away with a sadly divided mind. He had made it plain that the hundred and fifty dollars he had asked her to get him was not going to be mentioned to Doctor Bennett. Wasn't it her duty, in the light of Joe's condition, to tell? She demolished this question with a violent negative. Joe was still her boss, and he knew what he wanted better than all the doctors in Chicago.

There ran in her mind that night, as she vainly tried to sleep, an episode in one of Kipling's jungle stories, about a tiger—not a completely admirable tiger, either—who was charged and trampled by a herd of buffalo. The thought of that beautiful lithe thing beaten down into the mire under those heavy insensate hoofs was unbearably tragic.

They had got him, indeed, as Joe said. "This time." Was it believable that there could be a next time? During the dark of that night, at least, this was beyond the capacity of Jennie MacArthur's faith.

CHAPTER NINE

BELOW THE FALLS

THERE has not been, and of course there never will be, a "next time" for Joe Greer, if one means by the phrase a return match with John Williamson and his allies. This story which began—if a story can be said to begin—on the April day in 1919 when they organized the company, ended on the Friday after Harding's election when Jennie went to Williamson's office and signed, under Joe's power of attorney, the contract the financiers offered her. They were completely and finally the victors; the spoils of Joe's process for making linen of the straw that had once been burned in the fields belonged to them; not to Joe whose imagination had conceived the process, nor to the small careful modestly prosperous folk who built the mills, nor to the farmers who grew the flax.

Reluctantly one concedes the improbability of any other outcome, even if Joe had never summoned his disturbing daughter from California to live with him, nor sustained a concussion of the brain and resorted to alcohol as a cure, nor fallen in love with his antagonist's wife. Unimaginative, soft, irresolute, kindly, as these stall-fed folk seemed to him to be, their qualities are more than he can cope with. They are truly gregarious; they are, by tradition and temper, collectors, harvesters, stowers-away, and a man like Joe, who has no real interest in property beyond the dynamic use of it as a part of the processes of getting something done, stands little chance against them.

There's another side to the thing, though. If John Williamson's jolly little daughter Dorothy is ever swept from her moorings by some storm of passion, as Beatrice was

swept, into an alien world, that experience will be determinative for the rest of her life. And if ever you find John huddled under a rug, shuddering from the exhaustion of alcoholic excesses, defeated, abdicating under the broadest power of attorney his lawyers know how to draw, you will be safe in prophesying that this is the end of John Williamson. But Joseph Greer and his daughter are actuated by a livelier principle, kinetic, not static; the river, not the reservoir. They may come crashing down over the falls—but they make their way.

Something about like this, though not formulated in quite these terms, was the conviction Henry Craven found Jennie abiding in when he talked with her about Joe for the first time after the capitulation. This was not until the very end of November. He'd been seriously ill with bronchitis—and glad to be—for three weeks. It was not upon Joe, however, that their conversation began.

She had greeted him with a double handshake and a spontaneous revelation of her pleasure in seeing him about again, and her concern over his illness. He flushed at her friendliness and said as he took the armchair she pulled up for him, "I ought to have said my say before I let you shake hands with me. Before I've finished you may want to take it back." He wouldn't be laughed out of this, either.

He took three envelopes from his pocket; one of them he told her was his resignation of his office as treasurer, and one his resignation as director. These he passed over to her. The third he kept in his hand. "About the directorate, I don't care," he said. "I'll leave it with you and if you want to keep me on for a while, to avoid having only a minority of the board left, why I'll be glad to serve. Whenever you want to make up a new board, you can just fill in the date. But the other resignation, as treasurer, I've dated as of November first, and that you must accept. I'd have got out before if I'd been free to do so."

Really there was no room for argument about this; the company in its clip-winged condition couldn't afford a

treasurer at a thousand dollars a month. She was horribly unhappy about it, all the same, and after a troubled moment of hesitation she broke out:

"Henry, don't mind, *please*, but—what are you going to do?"

He smiled rather dryly, after telling her he didn't mind. "I thought for a while that I was going to have the satisfaction of doing something decent at my own expense, but it doesn't seem to be coming out that way. Mr. McGregor—he's the president of our bank, you know, came to see me on his own hook night before last, to see if I wanted to come back to my old job with them. The succession's rather broken down, it seems, with poor Baxter's death and Larsen going to New York, and they don't see any one to put in.

"It was Mac's own idea, you see. John didn't even know he meant to ask me. Mac's just a professional banker, and he'd never have come to me unless he'd thought I was—as good as he could get. So I said I'd take it, then and there.

"John was surprised—and seemed a little annoyed—when I told him about it. He said their idea had been to give me the same job I'd had here, in the new company. I guess I made it plain to him—though it's very hard for me to say some things to John—that I didn't want anything to do with the new company. Anyhow, he asked me, with that smile of his, you know, if that applied to owning stock in it. I—I suppose you'll find it hard to believe, but I had to ask him what he meant by that.

"He said he'd put the proceeds of the sale of my stock in the old company—all but five shares so that I could stay on here as director—into the new, but that of course I needn't go in unless I liked. I told him I didn't, and thought that was the end of it.—At least . . .

"Jennie, when a man's been kind to you for half your life—the kindest person you've ever known, and that's John, you can't say things to him as you'd say them—on general principles. I tried to make myself believe he understood. But this morning, in the mail, I got John's check

for thirty-seven thousand dollars, with a letter from Rollie Mill saying it was what was due me from the sale of my stock in the Greer Company. I went round to his office but I couldn't even see him. All I could get out of Rollie was that it was perfectly straight bookkeeping; he'd figured it out for himself.

"Well, that's what's in this other envelope, Jennie. I feel as if it was—blood-money. Something I'd sold Joe for. And if there's any way it can be used *for* him, I want you to take it and use it."

She told him, terribly embarrassed by a fear she'd break down and weep over him, that there was no such use for it. "Joe isn't broke," she assured him. "He'll even get quite a decent little income out of the Greer Company, and he's got more or less besides in various things. You take that check, first thing to-morrow morning, and buy liberty bonds with it!"

"And don't go on feeling guilty about it, either. You didn't sell him out. He said to me, when I saw him, election night, that he had never expected you to tell him anything." And after spending a few minutes more upon him in argument and reassurance, she exclaimed, out of a full heart, "Oh, *Henry*, I'm glad you're back in the bank! It makes one less person I have to worry about, anyhow."

He had begun to smile over the touch of exasperation which was unmistakably mingled with her good will for him, when he saw in a flash that she was seriously worrying over some one else. He recalled the look he had surprised in her face the instant before she greeted him. It was not hard to guess who this other was.

"Is it something new about Joe?" he asked. "Something worse?"

It was a long while before she spoke, and then she did not answer his question. "I'm glad you came in, Henry. I guess you're the one person I can talk this over with. I'm going to have dinner to-night with Trix and her husband. They're in town and it's their wedding anniversary. I've got to make up my mind what to say to her

about it, or whether to say anything. Of course he's her father, and

"You see, Joe's disappeared from that place Doctor Bennett took him for his cure. Just—vanished. Without leaving a trace.—Well, of course, that's the way Joe would do it if he did it at all."

"How long ago?" Henry asked.

"Tuesday; after breakfast, some time. They notified Doctor Bennett that night, and he came straight around to me. Four days ago, that is, you see."

"Four days," Henry repeated somberly. "He couldn't vanish, could he? You'd think somebody would have seen him in that time, unless—oh, I suppose you must have thought of it, too. There's a lake right near that place, isn't there, Jennie?"

"Thought of his having killed himself, you mean? That's what Doctor Bennett is nearly out of his head about.—That's one of the things. He never did that, Henry. I'm perfectly sure he didn't. No, that isn't feminine intuition. I knew he meant to do this before he started. He had me bring him a hundred and fifty dollars in currency that morning, on the quiet."

"It strikes me as rather funny you did that," Henry remonstrated.

She gave a short laugh. "It didn't strike Bennett as funny. He pretty near took off my head. But I'd like to know why I shouldn't have done it. Joe's not a criminal nor a maniac. He wouldn't have gone to that place at all if he hadn't been too tired to argue about it. He can cure himself in his own way. Why, Henry, he quit drinking for a whole week down there in New York, right in the thick of everything. Then something happened to him—he didn't tell me what—and he began again. I think he's gone away to cure himself now. Anyhow, he'd never have taken a hundred and fifty dollars if he'd meant to jump into the lake. You can see that."

"What's being done to find him?" Henry asked.

The muscle in Jennie's jaw defined itself. "Not a

thing," she said. "That's what Bennett and I have been fighting about. I won't have it, Henry! If he wants to disappear, it's his own business. There's none of us has a right to start a hue and cry after him. He can go where he likes, and come back when he gets ready. Of course it's hard for the people who are fond of him, but he never did think much about things like that. For all I know, there may be a few people that he wouldn't mind having believe he'd drowned himself. There's a streak of that in Joe. He isn't perfect. But it would never occur to him that you or I or Trix would think he had done that; and the only thing for us to do is to wait until he comes back."

"What does Beatrice think about it?" Henry asked dubiously. "Of course if she agrees with you, there's nothing to be said."

"Well, there you are," Jennie confessed miserably. "That's why I hate to go to dinner with them to-night. You see, Trix doesn't know. She doesn't know anything, I mean. About Joe's breakdown, or what happened to the business, or the sanitarium."

"You can't mean to go on keeping her in the dark!" The idea horrified Henry. "Anyhow, you couldn't if you wanted to. She's sure to find out."

"Doctor Bennett would tell her in a minute, of course," Jennie admitted. "And she could give him all the authority he needs for starting a search. But he doesn't know where she is. That made-up name she uses when she does exhibition flying at fairs and things wouldn't mean anything to him, if he happened to see it. And she's going to California in a day or two. She's got a contract to do some stunts for the movies."

She went thoughtfully on, overriding Henry's hardly articulate protest: "If I could be sure I could make her see it my way, and that she'd go ahead as if nothing had happened, I'd tell her. But I can't be sure. When Trix takes the bit in her teeth, she's just as hard to manage as Joe himself. She adores him, and if she got the idea that

he was down and out—wandering around, like a lost dog, you know . . . ”

Her voice broke over that and the tears came up into her eyes, but she went resolutely on. “If she got that idea, she’d drop everything and try to find him; and the worst of it is, she’d most likely succeed. It would be about the worst thing that ever happened to Joe, if she did. He made me promise I wouldn’t tell her, too. I guess that settles it.” She drew a long breath and leaned back in her chair. “Well, I have talked it through, anyhow, Henry,” she concluded. “Much obliged.”

She came back to Henry’s own affairs when he rose to go, gave him both hands again, and wished him luck. “This office won’t seem like the same place without you,” she said.

“Well, that,” he confessed, with one of his funny flashes of audacity, “has been a consideration that helped reconcile me to the change.”

“You mean,” she asked, not quite so surprised as she pretended to be, “that you are glad of a chance to get away from me?”

“Yes,” he said boldly. “From you in your official capacity. I think perhaps seeing me out of office hours exclusively, you will begin to forget what a preposterously poor business man I am.”

She told him briskly that this was nonsense; but he had the satisfaction of seeing her blush.

That was a dreary winter for Jennie, and would have been hardly endurable but for the companionship, out of office hours, of Henry Craven. They were much together, especially after Margaret returned to Italy in January. They went to most of that season’s plays together; dined at least as often as once a week, sometimes in odd little restaurants, sometimes in Jennie’s flat. They talked life over endlessly; ideas, people, their own experiences and states of mind. Sometimes, but not often, they talked of Joe, of whom in all those months nothing had been heard.

Finally, along in the spring, Henry asked her to marry him.

He did it out of a clear sky rather, a little desperately (perhaps the expectation of his sister Margaret's return from Italy within a fortnight nerved him against further procrastination), one night as Jennie was driving him home in her Ford from a play. It was a comedy which Jennie hadn't enjoyed very much—her sense of humor was not her strongest point—about an abysmally stupid woman who by dint of industrious meddling and doing everything wrong, miraculously brought everything out right for her distracted husband.

"I suppose," Jennie said indignantly, as they drove over the bridge, "there are plenty of successful business men who would be just as infatuated over a fool of a woman like that as he was."

"Well," Henry said, "I'm not a successful business man. You've got to admit that. So I ought not to be suspect." He didn't say another word until after they had crossed Chicago Avenue. Then he declared, "You know what I'm trying to say, Jennie. I want you to marry me. Do you think you could make up your mind to that?"

"Oh, wait!" she cried, with a gasp. And, indeed, it was not the sort of question to ask a lady who was driving through that pelting traffic.

He told her in his kindest way, not to mind. There was no hurry.

She threaded the little car through the south-bound stream at the mouth of his street, and pulled up at the curb before his door. Then she folded her arms over the wheel and for a moment put her head down upon them. "I'm all right," she told him. "Only, you gave me sort of a shock, Henry."

"Why, I've been getting round to it for months," he protested. "You must have seen that!"

She owned she'd thought of it once or twice. "But only as a thing that couldn't possibly happen. I guess I'm as great a fool about this sort of thing as . . ."

"As I am about business. Well, then, that's all right."

She said indignantly this wasn't what she meant. It was the woman in the play she had been thinking of. "All the same," she went on, getting herself together, "I think I'm right about this. You've never had much—well, romance. You've had no chance for it. Not since you were a boy and fell in love with your cousin Violet. Now, with your sister making money hand over fist, and your own income, and your job at the bank, you're free. You ought to fall in love with somebody ten or fifteen years younger than I am; pretty and mysterious and exciting and all that."

He laughed. "When it comes to mystery—for me—you leave this crop of flappers nowhere. You're the most wonderful person I've ever known, Jennie."

She caught her breath at that, and laughed in turn, but he did not continue on this tack. His own feelings were clear enough, he said. He knew what he wanted. But the point was, what did she want. How did she feel about him?

"I don't know," she said soberly. "I like this pretty well as it is. I don't believe I could ever want anything very different unless—well, unless I was sure you did. Unless you wanted something different—terribly."

"I don't believe I'll have any trouble convincing you, Jennie," he told her. And then, with his familiar considerateness, since he saw she was shaken and distressed by doubts, he covered her hands with his, and said she wasn't to worry about it, anyhow. She could have all the time she wanted for making up her mind.

"You're a dear, Henry," she said, with a catch in her voice. "If I ever marry anybody, it will be you."

He was well pleased with the beginning he had made, and he looked forward to going up to her flat to lunch with her the following Sunday, in the fearful hope that the matter might be explicitly and finally settled after all, before Margaret got home. But on Saturday after-

noon, within a few minutes of his homecoming from the bank, she amazed him by appearing, in a radiance of un-suppressed excitement, at his own door.

"I couldn't wait for to-morrow," she said. "I could hardly wait to get here. I almost spoiled it by telephoning. Henry, I've heard from Joe—a long letter. He's all right again; just as I've always said he'd be."

It was strange that Henry's heart should have sunk at that, but it did. "Oh, that's wonderful!" he said. "Come in and sit down, and tell me about it."

"I don't believe I *can* sit down," she confessed. But she made him do so, in an easy chair, and light his pipe. Impatiently, she squeezed the tears out of her eyes. "I don't know if I can talk either. You see, he's the old Joe again, as he hasn't been—oh, hardly since you've known him, Henry. That letter, it was like a boy's letter—a schoolboy's. Some of the things in it, you don't know whether to believe or not. He never cared whether you did believe him or not. Only laughed.

"He told me the way he disappeared from that place where Doctor Bennett took him. He was walking around the grounds, thinking he would just walk away as he was—he had that money with him, of course—when he heard a couple of men on the other side of a clump of bushes talking Spanish—a sort of Spanish—and he sat down and talked with them. They were part of a gang that was building a road, a concrete road, right by the sanitarium. They were being worked awfully hard, trying to finish that stretch before frost.

"One of them didn't like it and said he was going to quit. Joe gave him some money, and promised him some more, to go to the village and buy him some common clothes and a razor, and things, and bring them back there. And then he shaved off his beard and dressed in the working clothes, and went out and got a job with the gang, having everything interpreted for him into Spanish before he would understand it. He was right there through all the excitement over his having disappeared. He must have

enjoyed that—though the work pretty near killed him, he said.

"It only lasted three or four weeks before they had to stop on account of the frost, but he got interested in roads by that time. Thinking about them. Thinking about getting something that would be better than concrete. So he went down to New Jersey to some of the big chemical plants there, and looked around and asked questions. Joe can get anybody to tell him anything, of course. And then he began to get an idea.

"He has set up a little laboratory of his own—I don't know where he got the money, but he always kept some handy—and he thinks he's on the trail of what he is looking for. Something that will be cheaper than concrete, and just about as easy to lay—when you know how to do it; and as good for horses as it is for motor-cars. He's almost ready, he says, to go at it in a big way. If he gets it, it will be about the biggest thing there is. He says his name is going to be spelled with a small letter some day, just the same as Macadam's was."

"You don't suppose he has got hold of a thing like that, do you?" Henry asked.

She turned upon him sharply. "When he says he has it, he'll have it," she retorted. "It will be all there, from beginning to end—and it'll work. His flax process worked, didn't it?"

Henry blinked, and acknowledged that it did. Then he laid down his pipe, and clasped his hands. Jennie was no longer looking at him.

"Oh, I don't care whether it works or not, as long as he does—his mind, I mean—in the old way. If that doesn't turn out right, he'll find something else. He says that by fall, he thinks, he'll need me down there. He will when we really get going, anyway."

It was then she looked around at Henry Craven, sitting very still in his easy chair, his hands between his knees. She uttered a little cry of dismay, stood gazing at him for a moment without moving, and then as the tears came, she went over to him without a word and kissed him.

"Oh, I understand," he told her. "Please don't feel unhappy about it. I haven't a doubt you're right. And nothing is spoiled that we've got."

"I love you better than I do him," she said, turning away again. "At least I think I do. I've never dreamed of marrying him, and never would—even if he wanted me to. But in another way—a sort of office way—I've *been* married to him, all along. And now he's coming back, and wants me again . . ."

Once more he told her in his kindly reassuring voice that it was all right and that he understood, but something in his look filled her with panic, and she said with great emphasis that she must be running on at once. He made no effort to detain her, but at the door, as he held it open, he asked:

"How about lunch, to-morrow? Am I still invited on the old terms?"

"Of course!" she said, and he shut the door behind her rather quickly.

THE END

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